

FILLING THE GAPS IN | HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION

2022 ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT



LIGHT
HOUSE
RELIEF

TIME TO ENFORCE HUMAN RIGHTS

For people seeking refuge in Greece from wars, persecution, and other unfathomable hardships, every year seems to usher in harsher treatment, scantier support, and deteriorating living conditions.

In 2022 we witnessed an unprecedented number of pushbacks (988 instances denying entry to 26,133 people), property theft totalling around €2 million, violence, and degrading treatment at the borders, while at least 378 people lost their lives in the Aegean.

The lack of respect for human rights and dignity extended to the government's chaotic response to the group of 38 asylum seekers stranded for weeks on an islet: First, they claimed the people didn't exist, then that they couldn't find them despite receiving GPS coordinates, then that they couldn't save them because the islet was Turkish territory, before ceding that the territory was actually Greek and launching a smear campaign against the NGOs that had been trying to assist the refugees.

The scandal unleashed a fresh wave of attempts to criminalise the work of human rights defenders, journalists, and anyone who stands in solidarity with people on the move. *It is particularly shameful that dozens of humanitarian workers face trial in Greece, the land credited with inventing democracy and cradling Western civilisation.*

Greece, and Europe, more broadly, do have the capacity to receive asylum seekers humanely. They proved as much by welcoming 4.2 million Ukrainian refugees with temporary protection status and levels of support for housing and other needs that far surpassed assistance available to refugees from anywhere else.

Let's remember: under international law, anyone has the legal right to apply for asylum and have their case adjudicated on its merits (not politically motivated criteria such as Greece's determination of Turkey as a 'safe third country' for certain nationals).

The number of people driven away from home by geopolitical brinkmanship and inadequate collective efforts to mitigate and reverse the devastating effects of climate change has doubled over the past decade. This year, the world reached a dismal new record of 103 million forcibly displaced people. The vast majority stay within their own or neighbouring countries (low-and middle-income countries bordering crisis-affected areas host 74% of all refugees). Nonetheless, the trend of seeking international protection in Europe will continue as more people search for a place where they can live free from violence or catastrophe and put food on the table for their families.

Greece, like other Western host countries, has a choice to make: pursue increasingly cruel yet ineffective policies to try to keep people out while scapegoating refugees and migrants for all social ills. Or, start embracing newcomers and creating pathways for them to quickly acclimate and unleash their economic, cultural, athletic, academic, and other forms of potential.

The first option threatens to tear through the social fabric as simmering tensions bubble over. In contrast, the second might salvage an aging society with a shrinking population still recovering from economic disaster. The choice should be obvious, but policymakers continue to bury their heads in the sand while the media lets them off the hook and even reinforces their demonising narrative against anyone of migrant background.

TIME TO ENFORCE HUMAN RIGHTS

Against this backdrop, Lighthouse Relief remains steadfastly committed to filling gaps in humanitarian protection for people seeking refuge. We sound like a broken record, constantly repeating variations of the refrain, “Harsher policies and deteriorating living conditions leave more people than ever in need of support”. But it’s true.

Stricter eligibility criteria for camp residents to access food and the closure of state-run apartments for vulnerable asylum seekers have exacerbated the housing and food security crisis among people seeking refuge over the past year.

Over 2022, more people approached us every month for assistance feeding their families and finding a safe place to sleep at night. We responded by adding more food to our monthly distributions to vulnerable families and expanding our list from 100 to 200 (with 100 more on the waiting list).

BY THE END OF THE YEAR, THE MONTHLY REACH OF OUR INFO POINT, HELPLINES, DISTRIBUTIONS, CASE MANAGEMENT, AND REFERRALS EXTENDED TO MORE THAN 1,500 HIGHLY VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN ATHENS.

APPROXIMATELY HALF OF THEM ARE CHILDREN.

We are proud of this, but still can't keep pace with the rising needs, especially for shelter. Accordingly, we spent the better part of the year planning and fundraising to open emergency housing for single mothers and their children. We welcomed the first two families into an apartment in central Athens in early 2023!

Meanwhile, we also supported the mental health and psychosocial well-being of Ritsona camp residents for the seventh consecutive year.

Restructuring our program in the camp enabled us to offer more activities to more residents, reintroduce a female-friendly space, and incorporate informal education, such as health awareness, into our sports and other activities, all while achieving greater cost efficiency. We also began exploring ways to expand our psychosocial support to reach people outside Ritsona camp starting in 2023.

The year's highlights, according to our regular participants, include the photography workshop, guitar lessons, and the ever-popular football tournaments!

When we ask for feedback across Athens and Ritsona, the people we serve tell us how much they appreciate our nimble adaptation to meet new needs as they arise. It's feasible but takes flexibility and a deep understanding of the context coupled with funds not restricted to specific uses.

We have this thanks to the trust and loyalty of our partners. **Because we can count on your trust and financial support, more people can exercise their right to protection.**

Thank you sincerely for keeping us going through another challenging year.



Alana Chloe Esposito
Head of Communications
and Partnerships

ABOUT LIGHTHOUSE RELIEF



OUR MISSION IS TO FILL
GAPS IN HUMANITARIAN
PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE
SEEKING REFUGE.

AREAS OF SUPPORT AND SERVICES PROVIDED

Emergency Response
(Food, Non-Food Items,
Shelter)

**Access to Social
Services and
Integration Support**

**Mental Health and
Psychosocial Support**

Advocacy

- Information points
 - Streetwork and outreach shifts
 - Multilingual helplines
 - Emergency housing
 - Case management
 - Bearing witness
 - Raising Awareness
 - Safe spaces
 - Educational activities
 - Sports activities
 - Recreational activities
 - Referral pathways
 - Distributions
-

WHAT WE STAND FOR



OUR ETHOS OF FLEXIBILITY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND INCLUSIVITY MEANS THAT WE ADAPT QUICKLY TO EVOLVING NEEDS ON THE GROUND AND DRAW ON THE LIVED REFUGEE EXPERIENCES OF TEAM MEMBERS AND PARTNERS TO SHAPE OUR RESPONSE.

OUR VALUES

- Put **the people we serve first** by responding to their needs, valuing their ideas, and recognising them as part of the solution.
- **Prove ourselves worthy of trust**, respect, and support by communicating honestly and transparently with our partners, including when we fall short.
- **Never give up.** Adapt as circumstances change. Seek creative solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Be willing to learn and grow from mistakes.
- Welcome ideas and initiatives from **all community members**, regardless of background or affiliation. Within the team, avoid hierarchy and encourage constructive criticism.
- Uphold the highest standards of **human dignity** by recognising the humanity, agency, and equal rights of everyone.

SITUATIONAL SNAPSHOT

“Only 18% of people who started their trip towards the Greek Aegean islands in 2022 managed to arrive and were given the opportunity to apply for asylum – their legal right.” ([Aegean Boat Report](#))

Greece consistently ranks second in unmet medical care needs in the EU ([OECD](#)). Timely access to healthcare is a major problem for Greeks and migrants alike, often resulting in tragic, preventable deaths as in the recent cases of an infant ([Efsyn](#)) and a resident of Ritsona camp ([Hellas Posts](#)), both of whom had to wait unacceptably long for an ambulance.

NGOs, like Lighthouse Relief and others, try to fill the gaps in access to healthcare and other pressing needs, but increasingly controlled access to camps makes it harder and harder to reach people in need.

In other news, approximately 10,000 people were recently evicted from their supported accommodations in Athens, following the closure of Elaionas Camp and apartments for vulnerable asylum seekers (ESTIA II).

For many, the only option to avoid homelessness is to accept a transfer to an isolated camp far from Athens, but this is unfeasible for anyone who has a job or requires medical care or has experienced violence in camps and is afraid to go back. Accordingly, every day people in this predicament approach us and other NGOs in Athens asking for help finding shelter.

2022 BY THE NUMBERS

sea arrivals

12,756
(UNHCR)

6,022
(UNHCR)

land arrivals

missing or
dead

326
(IOM)

(in the Aegean only - for
the entire Mediterranean
the number is 1,522)

26,136
(Aegean Boat
Report)

pushbacks

Positive asylum
decisions

18,677
(Greek Asylum
Service)

And in the first two weeks of 2023...

THE HELLENIC COAST GUARD STOPPED
58 BOATS CARRYING 1710 PEOPLE

(Aegean Boat Report)



2022 | YEAR IN REVIEW

JANUARY

The coldest and snowiest winter in over a decade ushered in the new year. In Ritsona, water pipes froze and power outages lasted for days, while in Athens people living on the streets sought emergency shelter. We distributed blankets, warm clothes and heaters.

MARCH

Greece and other EU countries grant temporary protection for refugees from Ukraine following the Russian invasion. Approx. 70,000 Ukrainians come to Greece, where they receive accommodations, a dedicated government helpline, streamlined school enrollment and other means of assistance not offered to other refugees. The Migration Minister calls Ukrainians “real refugees” in contrast to people fleeing Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

MAY

A series of media reports raise questions about whether government plans to target NGOs assisting new arrivals at the Evros region could be part of a policy to intimidate people defending the rights of asylum seekers.

FEBRUARY

New policies restrict access to food to active asylum seekers living in camps, leaving half of Ritsona's population (people with refugee status or whose claim has been denied) facing hunger. We tried to intervene with food support, but were prohibited by camp authorities.

A shocking report by the EU anti-fraud office, OLAF, finds Frontex, the EU border agency, complicit in human rights violations including pushbacks from Greek territory. The Executive Director resigns.

APRIL

Hampered access to the asylum procedure deprives refugees of their rights and exposes them to the risk of detention. More frequent police round-ups leave thousands of people afraid to go out.

In response, we opened an office in the Victoria Community Centre, where people needing support can consult our social workers in a safe space rather than on the streets.

JUNE

International figures criticize Greece's criminalisation of solidarity, including UN special rapporteur for human rights defenders Mary Lawlor, who says it has a "chilling effect" on activists, journalists, and NGOs working on migration. Relatedly, Greece ranks last among EU states on the World Press Freedom Index (108th place).

JULY

The European Court of Human Rights orders the Greek authorities to rescue a group of 50 refugees stranded in the Evros region and provide them food, water and adequate medical care. Instead, they detain them and deport all but three to Turkey,

AUGUST

38 of them attempt to re-enter Greece and get stranded on an islet in the Evros river separating Greece and Turkey. They remain there under duress for several days while Greece and Turkey each insist the other country bears responsibility to rescue them. A 9-year old girl reportedly dies.

SEPTEMBER

In Ritsona, we re-opened our Female Friendly Space after a hiatus. Women started gathering daily to partake of beauty supplies, arts and crafts, and sport sessions.

We notice a high population turnover as many longtime residents from Syria and Afghanistan leave and newcomers arrive from Francophone Africa.

OCTOBER

We visited Lesbos as a team to rekindle ties with the people of the Skala Skymias, with whom we once worked hand-in-hand to support refugees. As a gesture of gratitude for their solidarity, we cleaned the beach and painted the fence of the old school. Over a dinner that elicited bittersweet tears in many eyes, we honoured lost lives, recalled the suffering we witnessed and celebrated the courage and benevolence that inspired everyone to persevere.

NOVEMBER

Food security eludes many people on the move in Greece, partly due to reduced food and cash support. While we lack official data, the spike in requests we receive and anecdotal evidence from our partner NGOs suggest that hunger is widespread. The number of families we serve through our monthly food distributions in Athens reaches 200, including some living in Ritsona and Malakasa camps.

DECEMBER

Apartments for vulnerable asylum seekers in Athens (ESTIA II) closed permanently, leaving several thousand people without safe accommodations. Some evictees returned to camps, but those who could not or were afraid to go ended up living on the streets. It further exacerbated the burgeoning homelessness crisis among people seeking refuge in Greece.



year in review
2022

RITSONA



The population fluctuated greatly from peak of 2,600 to 1,100. By the end of December it was roughly 2,000 and is expected to rise.

Over the course of the year 1,224 children, youth, and women visited our safe spaces and took part in our sports, recreational, and educational activities designed to support mental health and foster psychosocial well-being.

A security gate was installed in the spring, further restricting NGO access and deliveries to the camp. For now, it is not fully operational so residents can still leave and enter the camp freely, but this is expected to change soon.

PRIMARY CHALLENGES

- Policy changes restricting access to food to active asylum seekers left c. 1/3 of residents facing hunger. These include people who have already received refugee status or whose asylum claim and appeal were denied. Some parents kept their kids home from school to sleep longer and stave off hunger.
- Since responsibility for running the camp transferred from the International Organization of Migration to Greek authorities, the population census was only published twice. Information about residents has been hard to come by. Protection and coordination meetings with other actors in the camp also ended, making it difficult to know the population's needs and to avoid duplicating services.
- By the end of the year, most NGOs serving camp residents had withdrawn from Ritsona or scaled back their services, leaving residents critically underserved.



MENTAL HEALTH
AND PSYCHOSOCIAL
SUPPORT FOR

CHILDREN YOUTH & WOMEN

IN RITSONA

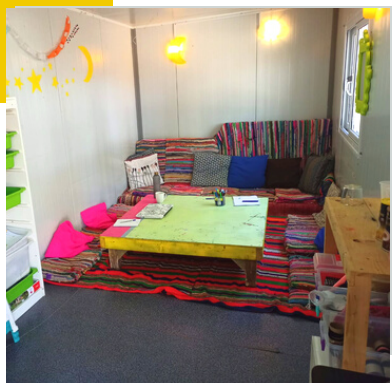


LITTLE LIGHTHOUSE

The reach of our child-friendly space expanded to also serve older children up to the age of 14. It offers arts and crafts, sports, and games that promote healthy habits, gender equality, and respect for others. In this space, we also run twice-daily sessions for 3-6 year-olds to help them stabilize, develop social skills, and learn techniques to regulate their emotions.

LIGHTHOUSE YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

When COVID restrictions finally lifted, we reopened our welcoming drop-in space for residents aged 15+ to drink tea and make use of foosball, musical instruments, sewing machines, a multilingual library, etc. We also facilitate popular activities, including community-led football tournaments, a volleyball club, and workshops ranging from guitar to photography to English. Community Volunteers typically lead these activities, which are chosen by residents.



LIGHTHOUSE WOMEN

We were thrilled to re-open our female-friendly space, where women can relax and socialize away from unwanted male attention. Equipped with beauty supplies, arts and crafts material, and other supplies, it invites women (and their daughters if they choose to bring them) to take a break from the dreary monotony of life in the camp. We also offer daily women's and girls' sports sessions and language classes through this space.

A STORY FROM RITSONA

“

*Chancel is a 22-year-old asylum seeker from the Democratic Republic of Congo. A week after arriving alone in Ritsona Camp, he stopped by our Youth and Community Centre, where he discovered to his delight, that he could play football.

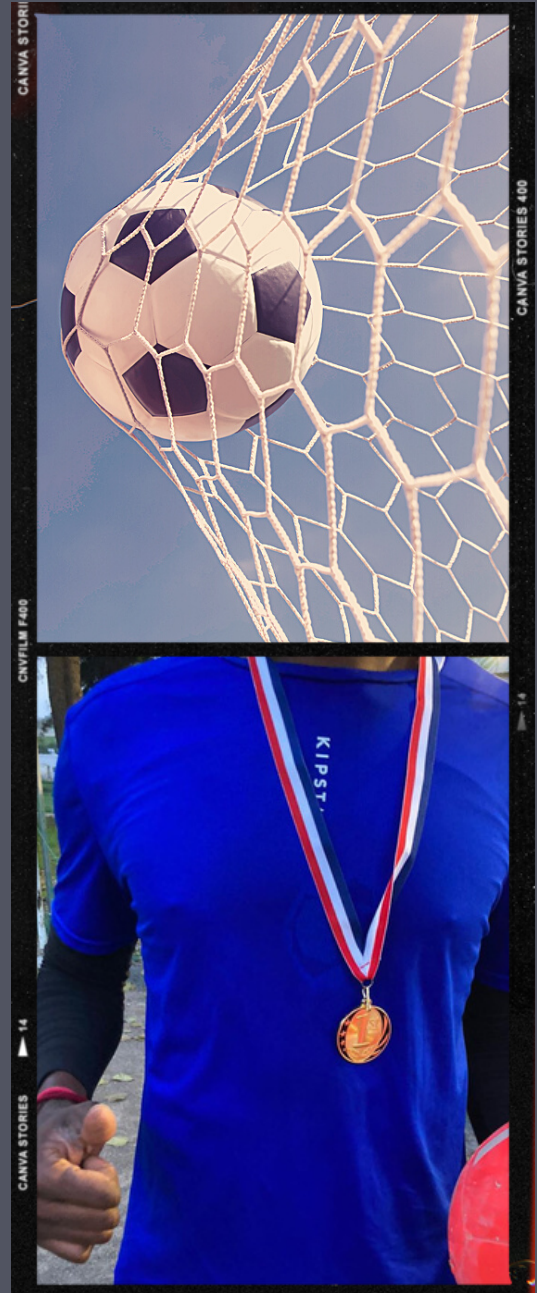
Like many camp residents, he played football since he could walk but hadn't had the opportunity for a long time. The chance to play again was like encountering a familiar friend in an otherwise alien and foreboding environment.

Initially, the other football players shunned Chancel as the only Black African. It is a phenomenon we often see lately, as more people from Francophone African countries join a population that mainly comprised Arabic and Farsi speakers until recently.

Yet, Chancel gradually won them over with his football skills, warm smile, and some support from the Lighthouse team through guided teamwork and cross-cultural communication exercises. Soon enough, the other players wanted Chancel on their team and even spent time with him outside of football sessions.

— **Jellina Keulen**
Ritsona Sports Coordinator

*Name has been changed for his protection



year in review
2022

ATHENS



2022 ushered in policies reducing food and cash assistance eligibility and decreased the supported housing supply. Meanwhile, hampered access to the asylum process and wait times of up to a year to get an interview appointment left more people undocumented for longer periods and, therefore, ineligible for any support and at risk of detention and deportation.

As an antidote, we doubled the number of families on our food distribution list (although we still have 100 additional families on the waiting list) and opened an office in the Victoria Community Centre, where people can consult our social workers in a safe space without risking detention.

PRIMARY CHALLENGES

- The rising rate of people facing homelessness and hunger far outpaces the capacity of NGOs to provide food and shelter.
- When the EU-funded program to house highly vulnerable asylum seekers in apartments ended, many residents were forced to move to camps that cannot adequately accommodate their needs.
- Moreover, because the only camp within the city of Athens closed, they were sent to isolated camps far from public transportation, hospitals, schools, job opportunities etc.
- Many NGOs closed or left Greece due to lack of funding and criminalisation of solidarity with people on the move. Several sent their constituents to us, but we lack the capacity to meet all their needs.



HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION | ATHENS

Filling the support gaps for the most vulnerable asylum seekers



LAURA'S STORY

Fleeing violence in Congo, Laura* arrived in Greece with her infant son in 2020. She approached us just before Christmas asking for help finding shelter. They had been sleeping in Pedion tou Areos (park in Athens) and the baby had a bad cough. Laura is a registered asylum seeker, but has no access to supported accommodation. She is among the thousands of single mothers facing homelessness.

We placed her in a hotel for two nights until we could find her temporary shelter through one of our partner organizations. Then, in early 2023, we welcomed her and her son into our new apartment for single mothers. While living there, she receives holistic support to help her prepare to live independently in the near future.

**Name changed for her protection.*



IN 2022, WE ACHIEVED:

- Supported 6,000+ refugees and asylum seekers who were facing food insecurity, homelessness and other challenging situations.
- Distributed food, hygiene kits (38,000 items), winter clothing, and other essentials to 200 families per month (approximately 1,000 people, 50% of whom are children).
- Helped 850 people access healthcare and public services. We booked and escorted them to appointments, provided translation and referred them to other NGOs providing legal aid, shelter, or whatever other specialized services they might need.
- Responded to thousands of inquiries and requests for assistance through our information point, multilingual helplines, and outreach shifts, providing vital information and guiding people to solutions.

ADVOCACY



We bear witness to and raise awareness about the increasingly harsh circumstances for people seeking refuge in Greece. Ultimately, we seek to build a movement to enforce the rights of asylum seekers.



As part of the **Advocacy Working Group**, we endorsed the following letters, policy positions, and advocacy statements:

- Closing Supported Accommodation for Vulnerable Asylum Seekers leaves many without access to shelter and school.
- NGOs Welcome the Resumption of Cash Assistance and Call for Gaps to be Urgently Filled ([link](#)).
- Mental Health is an invisible Vulnerability for Refugees and Asylum seekers on Lesbos ([link](#)).
- Greater Recognition of Vulnerabilities and Protection for LGBTQI+ Asylum Seekers and Refugees ([link](#)).
- Letter from the social workers Protesting the Closure of Elaionas Camp ([link](#)).
- The Instrumentalisation Regulation will be the Final Blow to a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) ([link](#)).
- Allow Refugees to stay in the Closed Controlled Access Centres (camps) for more than 30 days post-recognition ([link](#)).
- NGOs call for a humane treatment of asylum seekers accommodated in prison-like camps ([link](#)).
- Open letter requesting a special residence permit and extending legal protections for unaccompanied children until age 21 ([link](#)).
- Letter to the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights Calling for Residence Permits to be Granted to all Children ([link](#)).

TESTIMONIALS



Working with multiple NGOs in Greece, I give money and volunteer with Lighthouse Relief because they are the organization most in touch with the people they serve on the ground and in the camps every single day. This small organization is an important part of the humanitarian ecosystem working on the refugee crisis in Greece. Other organizations look to them to understand the true needs that exist at any given moment. The people in need look to Lighthouse to find the resources they need to survive today and to work to build a more secure future tomorrow.

- Anders Hsi, donor and Advisory Board Member

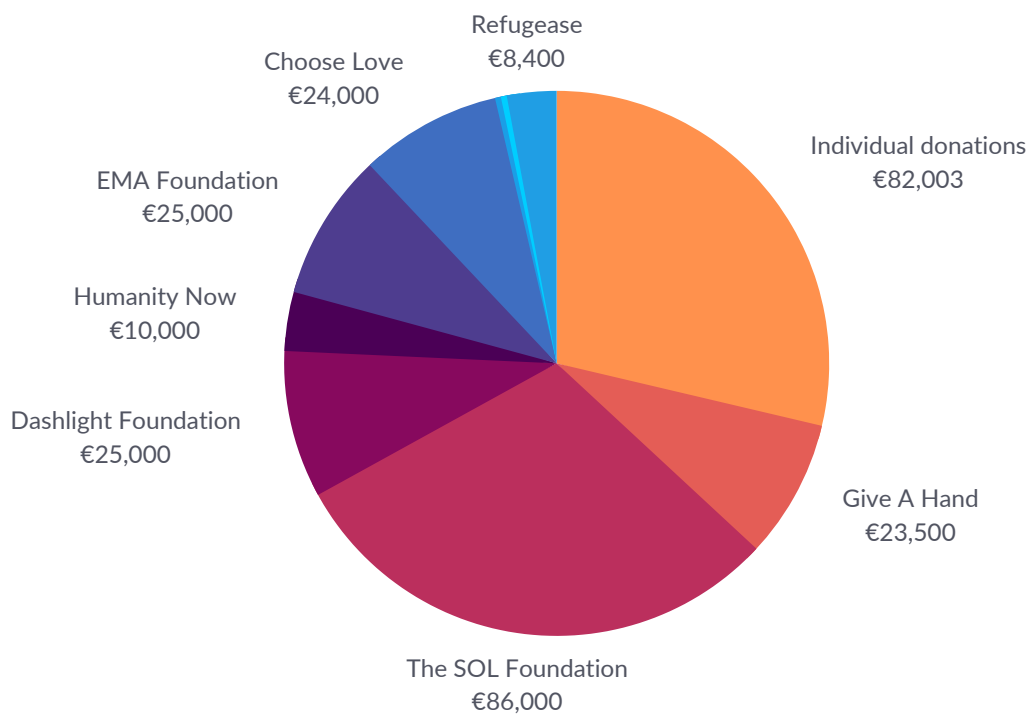


Our initial support for Lighthouse Relief came about as I had direct experience working with the psychosocial programme team in Ritsona camp in 2019/20 and saw first hand the impact of the psychosocial programming. Since then we have been impressed by the adaptability and resilience of the organisation in light of continuing and in many ways growing challenges. As only a small number of NGO's are still working within the walls of a camp for displaced people in Greece, we believe Lighthouse is well positioned as a beacon of compassion and solidarity with displaced people who are otherwise faced with much hostility. We are privileged to support this important work and look forward to a more hopeful future for displaced people in Greece.

- Bethany Clarke, Dashlight Foundation

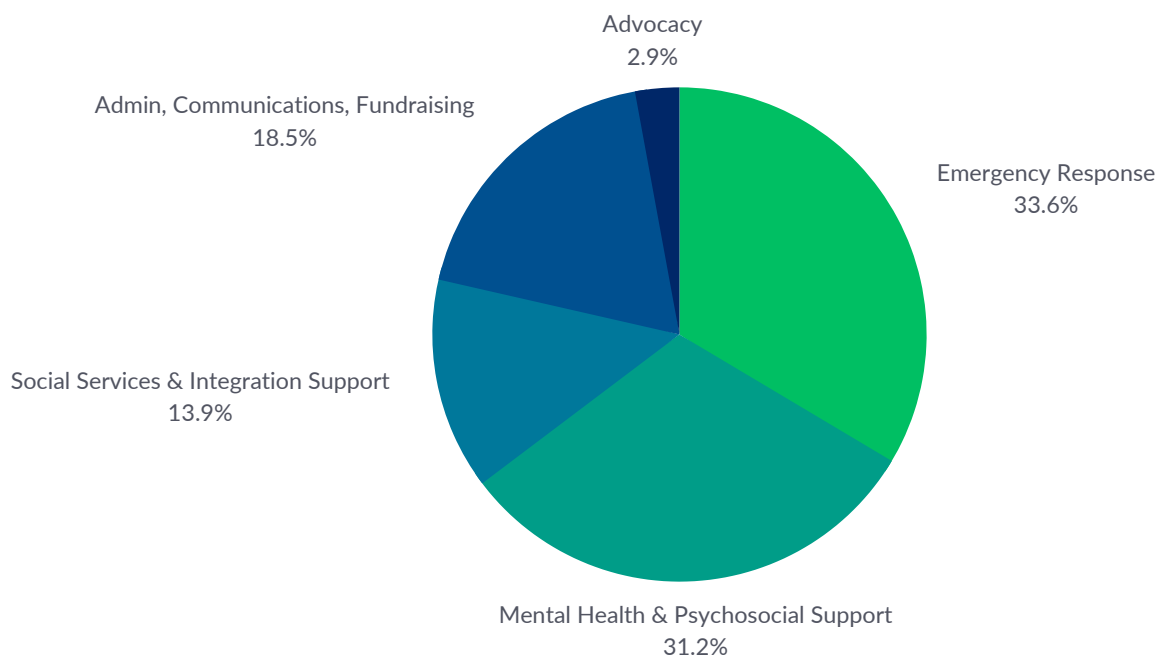


2022| FINANCIAL OVERVIEW



€285,903
TOTAL INCOME

€287,009
TOTAL EXPENSES



OUR THANKS



Our heartfelt thanks to the foundations, partners, volunteers, and individual donors who supported us with monetary and in-kind contributions in 2022.

Athens Collective

Attika for Solidarity

Better Life With Refugees

Choose Love

Christian Refugee Relief

Dashlight Foundation

EMA Foundation

FoodKIND

ForRefugees

Give A Hand

GlobalGiving

Humanity Now

HumanRights360

International Committee of the Red

Cross

LDS Charities

Lush Charity Pot

Meaalofa Foundation

Medical Volunteers International

One Happy Family

Refugee Aid From Taunton

RefugEase

Safe Place International

The SOL Foundation

Traverse Journeys

Rebecca Aguilar-Frances

Keith Dew

Brian Doty

Dale Greenwood

Anders Hsi

Nancy Jezyk

Maryjane Marcus

Jim McAuliffe

Bill Meyer

Bernadette O'Connor

David Riessner

Sara and James Star

Anika Sinha

*And everyone who contributed to
our crowd-funding campaigns!*

**YOU EMPOWER US TO FILL THE GAPS
IN HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION**



Call
To
Action!

JOIN OUR

COMMUNITY OF MONTHLY DONORS

TO SUSTAIN HUMANITARIAN
PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE
SEEKING REFUGE IN GREECE!

We aim to acquire 100 monthly donors
by the end of 2023, can you help us
by signing up today?









Filis 68 Athens, Greece

T : +30 210 831 8089 | E : info@lighthouserelief.org

www.lighthouserelief.org

-  /LighthouseRelief
-  @LighthouseRR
-  /lighthouserelief
-  /lighthouserelief