

DIGNIFIED
HUMANITARIAN
RESPONSE

TO FORCED MIGRATION

2021 ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT



LIGHT
HOUSE
RELIEF

COMPENSATING FOR **REDUCED SUPPORT**

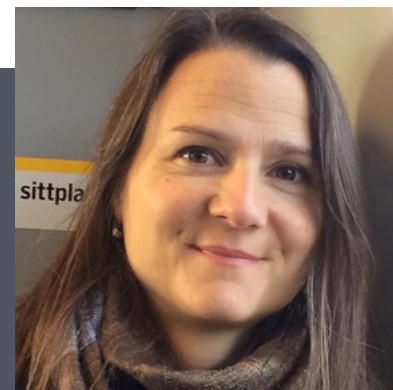
Today, Lighthouse's work in Greece looks very different to the work our founding members first carried out on the northshore of Lesbos in 2015. The many political shifts and turns that have taken place along the way have changed both the face and location of our programmes. When we began in 2015, we never expected that more than six years later there would still be a need for our work in Greece, or that circumstances would compel us to leave Lesbos. Nor did we expect the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Athens and Ritsona to grow.

Despite these developments, the Lighthouse spirit and dedication to supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Greece remains unchanged. Today our small but committed team works tirelessly in both Athens and Ritsona Camp to deliver dignified humanitarian support, whilst responding to the most urgent and critical needs of forcibly-displaced people.

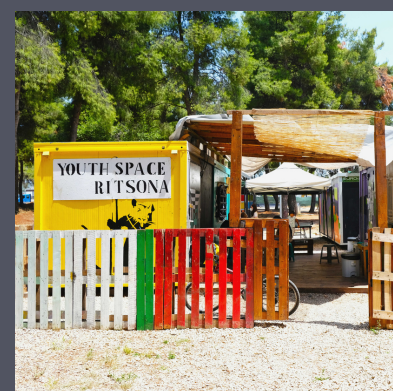
Looking back on the past year, 2021 was the most politically hostile year for asylum seekers and refugees since the signing of the EU-Turkey deal in 2016. Multiple new policies saw cuts to essential services including food, shelter and cash assistance, whilst access to asylum became even more complicated, difficult and dangerous. The construction of security systems and walls around mainland camps (including Ritsona), as well as the opening of closed camps on the Aegean islands sent a loud and clear message, that in Greece, asylum seekers will be controlled and contained. This political approach has no other goal than to make life even more unbearable for forcibly-displaced people in Greece.

In spite of this increasingly hostile political climate, we are committed to remaining in Greece and providing humanitarian assistance to people fleeing conflict and persecution. Inherent to our work is a promise to evolve our programmes and activities in line with the specific needs of asylum seekers and refugees, and to advocate for a renewed political approach that welcomes and supports each and every person who is in search of safety at Europe's borders.

Thank you for standing in solidarity with asylum seekers and refugees in Greece. In the face of growing hostility, your continued support sustains and strengthens our response.



SARA GRANATH
BOARD CHAIR



LIGHTHOUSE RELIEF AREA OF
RITSONA CAMP



THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE
TEAM CONDUCTING
STREETWORK IN ATHENS

OUR MISSION IS TO PROVIDE DIGNIFIED IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM RELIEF TO THOSE EXPERIENCING DISPLACEMENT.

REFLECTING BACK, **LOOKING FORWARD**

The year 2021 was marked by the persistence and **escalation of hostile policies** aimed at making life so difficult for refugees in Greece that other would-be asylum seekers might think twice before following in their footsteps. Reduced access to food, housing, and cash assistance. A higher rate of asylum claims rejected. Camps enclosed with prison-like walls. Increasing instances of violence at both land and maritime borders, and pushbacks of people who had already made it well into Greek territory. Eliminating means of registering asylum claims in most areas of the country. These changes failed to deter people fleeing wars, persecution, and inhumane living conditions from seeking safety in Europe, but succeeded in **deepening the humanitarian catastrophe** quietly festering on its doorstep.

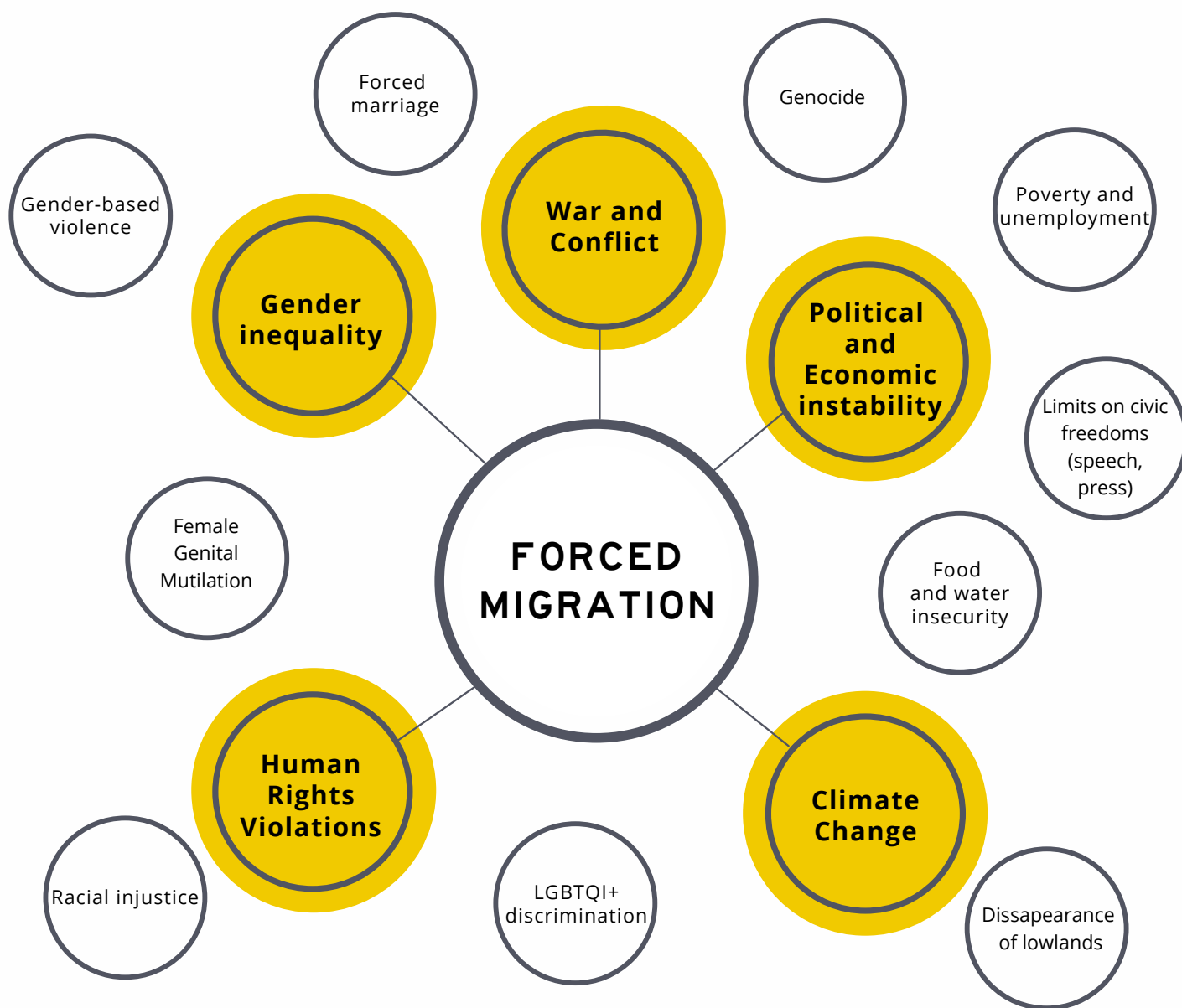
That Greece, like much of the world, was also in and out of strict lockdowns in response to the ebb and flow of COVID-19 waves only complicated matters for people trying to navigate the asylum system, including recognised refugees. They were last in line to receive access to the vaccines despite living in environments especially prone to the spread of COVID-19. The backlog of asylum applications grew as the entities responsible for processing them operated at reduced capacity. Residents of refugee camps endured restrictions on movement for two months longer than the general population for no apparent reason. And, when children were finally technically allowed to join their peers in school, at least 200 of them from Ritsona still had no access due to a lack of transportation.

Meanwhile, the **pandemic also continued to challenge the operations of humanitarian organisations** such as Lighthouse Relief. Safety protocols impeded our access to Ritsona camp and delayed the scaling up of our Streetwork project, which launched as a pilot in December 2020. Resources also dwindled as many philanthropic foundations diverted funding that we were previously eligible to apply for to NGOs focused on public health. Nonetheless, our team's determination to provide as much support as possible never wavered. From delivering English classes via WhatsApp to youth in Ritsona, to doubling up on masks during outreach shifts to support people experiencing homelessness, they adapted and persevered.

For seven years now, we at Lighthouse Relief have offered discreet, dignified support to asylum seekers and refugees who are increasingly demonised, subjected to harsh policies, and overlooked or forgotten by international humanitarian actors, the media, and funders. **Approximately 100,000 forcibly-displaced people still live in Greece with dim prospects of having their asylum claims fairly adjudicated and hence acquiring the legal status that grants access to basic public services.** Even those who obtain refugee status receive little support for finding a job, a home, and integrating into society. Their lives still matter. That's why we ask them what they need most and work with them to amplify their voices and deliver vital humanitarian support.

Our capacity to make a positive impact and respond to ever-evolving needs on the ground depends on the contributions of ideas, talents, financial support and the rolling-up-of-sleeves-and-getting-to-work of many dedicated individuals, NGOs, and foundations. We are proud to partner with you and grateful to count you as friends. We couldn't do any of it without your support. **Thank you sincerely.**

In many places across the globe, a multitude of factors contribute to the deterioration of living conditions to the extent that life becomes untenable and inhabitants are forced to flee.



Asylum seekers and refugees in Greece are among the *100-million people* worldwide who have been *forcibly displaced* from their homelands.

2021 | YEAR IN REVIEW



MARCH

The migration or interior ministers of Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Italy and Spain meet in Athens.

They call for a strengthening of external borders and for a European mechanism to return migrants and refugees to their countries of origin. Meanwhile, Ritsona Camp residents protest against unreasonably long delays in the asylum procedures.

MAY

Greece lifts its 7-month national pandemic-related lockdown, but restrictions remain in place for refugees and asylum seekers in many places.

JULY

Asylum seekers living outside official accommodation structures (i.e. camps) lose access to cash assistance. Approximately 25,000 people are at risk of homelessness and food insecurity, including children and people with disabilities.

Police on Lesbos announce they are indicting 10 individuals across four NGOs for alleged espionage and trafficking activity. The NGOs in question are all active in search and rescue operations.

APRIL

In Ritsona, COVID-19 cases rise and a prison-like wall goes up around the perimeter, further isolating the community.

Greece shuts down Kara Tepe camp on Lesbos, moving hundreds of residents to a tent city, and announces the pending closure of several mainland camps without specifying where residents will go.

JUNE

A Greek ministerial decision enters into force deeming Turkey a safe third country for Afghans, Syrians, Somalis, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. These nationalities represent 67 percent of asylum seekers in Greece. They are now rarely processed for asylum because they must first explain why they could not apply in Turkey.

AUGUST

As wildfires rage across Greece, 2,000 residents of Malakasa Camp are evacuated to Ritsona. Our team supports food and water distributions. Meanwhile, following the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, Greece receives 819 Afghan evacuees (mostly women MPs, judges and journalists) by the end of November.

SEPTEMBER

In an effort to "decongest the islands", the government closes several camps and moves residents to Athens without accommodation support. Soon after, a proliferation of people experiencing homelessness appear in Victoria Square.

NOVEMBER

The possibility to begin the asylum pre-registration process via Skype ends, but the planned centres where people can register in person do not open, effectively barring people on mainland Greece, Crete, and Rhodes from claiming asylum. As long as they remain unregistered they have no access to public services or special assistance and live in fear of being pushed back to Turkey illegally.

OCTOBER

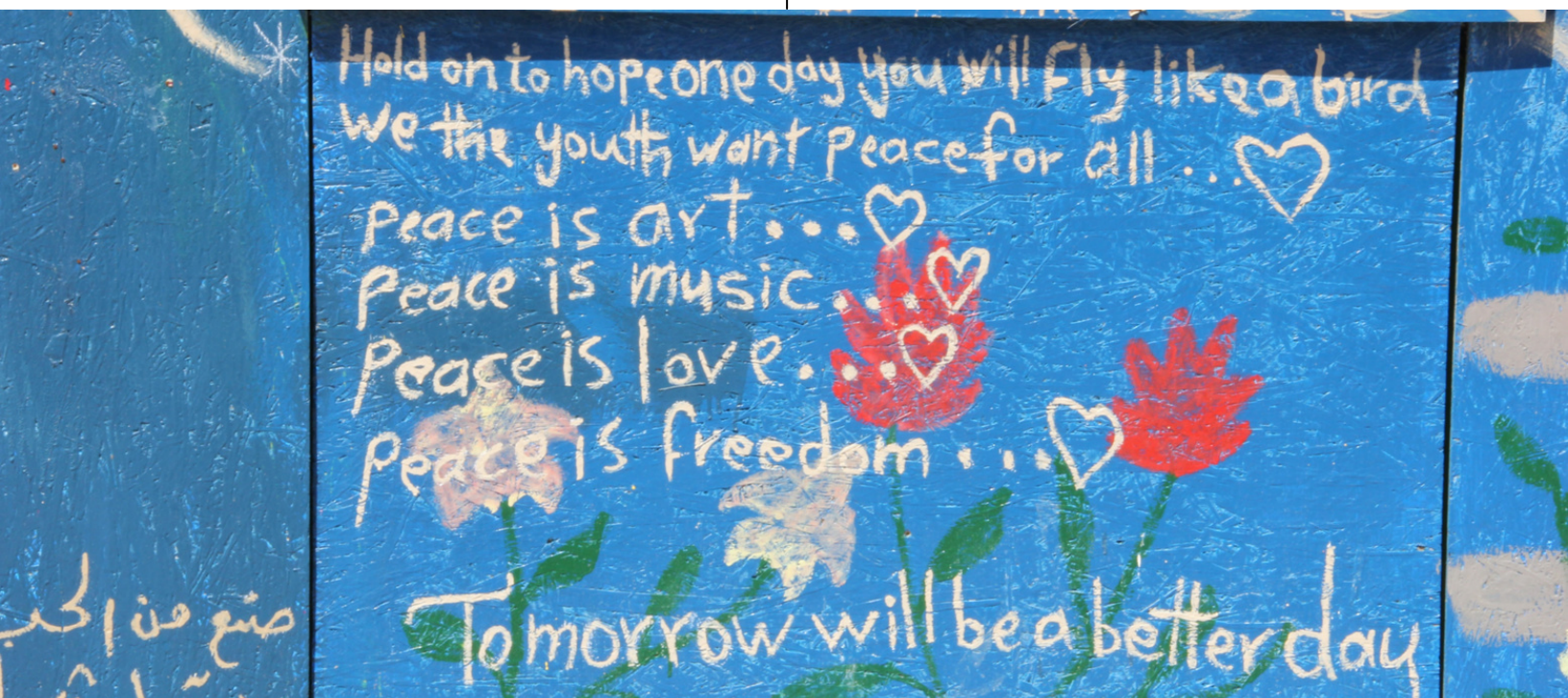
The Greek migration ministry takes over the management of cash aid to refugees from UNHCR, but payments are subsequently delayed causing hunger.

The Hellenic Coast Guard rescues 380 refugees in a stricken ship south of Crete, in the largest refugee haul of the year. GPS information supplied by NGOs suggests the authorities tried to send it back to Turkey before bringing passengers onshore in Kos.

DECEMBER

Three boats overfilled with refugees capsize in three different parts of the Aegean, leading to at least 31 deaths and dozens of people missing. It is the worst Aegean death toll since October 2015, when a boat sank off the coast of Lesbos.

Food access is restricted in camps. Meanwhile, rising numbers of people, including families with children, experience homelessness as temperatures plummet and Greece's harshest winter in decades sets in.





IN 2021

LIGHTHOUSE RELIEF:



Distributed 9,424 essential items, including personal hygiene, baby supplies, and cold weather protection, to **621** families experiencing homelessness or unsafe living conditions in Athens.



Provided monthly dry food, baby formula, and fresh produce, milk, and eggs to **302** families and individuals experiencing food insecurity in Athens.



Developed a new 3-year strategic plan. Our strategy is to fill the growing gaps in vital services to refugees and asylum seekers in Greece and advocate for policies that facilitate their integration to society.



Expanded our Streetwork project into a more holistic emergency response that includes case management, monthly distributions of food and basic necessities, referrals to other providers of legal and other services, and WhatsApp helplines.



Supported 1,150 Ritsona camp residents (mostly children in youth) in activities ranging from sports, to music, to English classes, all designed to support their psychosocial wellbeing and offer a semblance of normalcy.



Engaged 24 community volunteers in Ritsona to co-design and lead our activities for children and youth. We supported them with trainings and skill-building workshops.



Advocated for access to schools, resumption of food and cash assistance, and restoration of readily accessible means of starting an asylum application by co-signing seven letters and policy recommendations.



Adapted our psychosocial support in Ritsona camp to conform with COVID-19 safety measures. This included securing mask donations for the community and conducting activities remotely via WhatsApp.



Grew our network of partners, including both grassroots organisations with whom we collaborate on the ground as well as philanthropic and private institutions that support us financially.



Our plan is to align our focus on children and youth with a broader objective to serve those who may fall into service gaps. As we look to the future, we remain committed to a participatory approach to humanitarian relief that is equally inclusive and responsive to the needs of women and men. In conjunction, we seek to become stronger advocates for refugee rights and to achieve financial sustainability.

We focus on:

- 1 **Displaced populations, undocumented migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Greece**
- 2 **Children and youth living in Ritsona, the largest refugee camp in Greece**
- 3 **Families in Athens experiencing homelessness or living under precarious conditions with little or no social services available**
- 4 **Populations in need of extra support, especially single mothers, children, and youth**
- 5 **Grassroots organisations and movement partners that seek to prevent displaced populations from falling through the cracks of society**



Participatory Approach

Our approach to humanitarian relief responds flexibly to the evolving needs of people experiencing displacement. We make it a priority to listen to people from the communities we support and encourage them to be equal partners in our activities.



Advocacy

We bear witness to and document the increasingly difficult circumstances confronting forcibly displaced people in Greece. Our goal is to raise awareness and eventually reverse the cruel policies designed to deter asylum seekers.



Psychosocial Support

We offer opportunities for young refugees living in camps to relieve stress and regain a semblance of normalcy through recreational and educational activities as well as informal counselling. As safe spaces to socialize, play, and learn, our cluster of cheerfully decorated ISO containers in Ritsona provides a place where children can be children.



Emergency Relief

Approximately 100,000 asylum seekers in Greece currently have no form of supported accommodation and struggle to access housing, medical care, and cover their basic needs. We strive to meet their material needs, provide consultations with social workers, and serve as the “missing link” to other service providers who can give housing and legal support.



**Psychosocial
Support**

RITSONA



Ritsona camp is located in a sparse industrial area 75 km from Athens. It is now the largest refugee camp in Greece. Currently, 38% of the 2,600 residents are children and the majority come from Afghanistan (33%) and Syria (32%).

By the end of 2021, needs in Ritsona were greater than ever. Recent arrivals to camp included higher percentages of unaccompanied children, single mothers, and survivors of gender violence and/or discrimination, including people who identify as LGBTQI+. Only 1,000 out of 2,600 residents received food. Lighthouse Relief began to adapt to meet these urgent needs.

DETERIORATING CIRCUMSTANCES

Over 2021, life in the camp grew even more difficult:

- Children had little access to school due to bureaucratic delays, crowded classrooms, transportation issues, and COVID-19 disruptions.
- A high, prison-like wall was erected around the perimeter of the camp, fostering stress and anxiety.
- One-third of residents had neither access to food nor cash assistance as a result of recent policy changes.
- Tensions rose as a result of increasing hardship.



2021 | Psychosocial Support

Children
and youth

IN RITSONA

REGAIN A SEMBLANCE OF NORMALCY



LITTLE LIGHTHOUSE

A child-friendly space that offers early childhood development support for 3-5 year-olds to develop social skills, gain exposure to multiple languages, and learn how to regulate their emotions through play and learning activities.

LIGHTHOUSE YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

A drop-in space (formerly known as YES) for residents aged 15+ to drink tea and make use of foosball, musical instruments, sewing machines, etc., and participate in workshops such as photography and English.



LIGHTHOUSE SPORTS

Football, basketball, volleyball, and other sports provide physical exercise, stress relief, and confidence-building. Younger children play games designed to instil values of gender equality and respect for others while becoming team players. Activities are also designed to reinforce healthy hygiene habits such as hand-washing and teeth-brushing.

2021 | Emergency Response in Athens



STREETWORK

In December 2020, we launched the Streetwork Project in Athens to provide dignified support to vulnerable individuals and families, facilitate refugee integration, and strengthen a city-wide support network for people experiencing homelessness.

Regrettably, we anticipate the number of asylum seekers and refugees experiencing homelessness in Athens to rise over the next few months. The two main reasons for this are the imminent closure of both Elaionas camp in Athens and the ESTIA II urban housing programme that currently accommodates 27,000 vulnerable people. These developments will likely leave many more people in need of support. At the same time, it is more dangerous for undocumented people to be on the streets due to increasing police roundups.



OUR SERVICES

- Outreach shifts to ascertain the needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- Food, hygiene kits, winter clothing, and other essential distributions.
- Booking medical and public service appointments.
- Assistance entering shelters or housing programmes.
- Guidance through bureaucratic procedures and translations.
- Consultations with a social worker.
- Multilingual emergency helplines.



“ When we started the project, we were meeting mostly people in accommodation programmes who needed support with non-food items and social services. Now, we are finding many people coming from the island camps who are living in the streets.

— Lourdes Tello
Emergency Response Coordinator





Together with our partners we drafted and/or endorsed the following letters, policy positions, and advocacy statements:

- [Greece deems Turkey "safe,"](#) but refugees are not: The substantive examination of asylum applications is the only safe solution for refugees
- [Walling off welcome:](#) New reception facilities in Greece reinforce a policy of refugee containment and exclusion
- [Are you Eligible to Eat?](#)
- [Denying food](#) - instead of receiving protection people go hungry on EU soil
- [Free Humanitarians Open Letter](#)
- [A big setback in integration:](#) The cut in aid to asylum seekers

Issue Areas

- Violations of international refugee law/maritime law, including pushbacks/pullbacks (principle of *non-refoulement*)
- Policy changes that reflect growing hostility towards asylum seekers and the NGOs and volunteers who support them
- Discriminatory attitudes and practices toward asylum seekers including by figures of authority (such as police)
- Deteriorating living conditions for people residing in accommodation centres (refugee camps)
- The adverse effects of living in legal limbo during the lengthy asylum process
- The factors that push people to flee from their homes
- Media representations of people on the move

CALL TO ACTION

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY OF **MONTHLY DONORS** BRINGING **RELIEF** TO PEOPLE EXPERIENCING **FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN GREECE.**

Donors who give monthly provide vital support to Lighthouse Relief by ensuring that we have stable income to run our programmes.

Our **goal** is to acquire **100 monthly donors** by the end of 2022! Can you **help us out** by signing up today? [Donate monthly!](#)

What are the benefits?

- Assures **stable funds** to support Lighthouse Relief's longevity
- More **convenient** (avoid the hassle of re-entering your details every time you make a new payment)
- Reduces our fundraising costs so **more of your donation goes directly to supporting our mission**
- An effective way for you to **budget your philanthropy**
- An opportunity to **give more generously** throughout the year



2021 | Testimonials



“ We are committed to supporting international solidarity organizations that help the most disadvantaged with the hope of transforming their future. The organizations we activate projects with are therefore carefully selected. Working with Lighthouse Relief was an easy choice. The organization's mission and activities are in perfect alignment with our values. In addition, the team members we have had the pleasure of working with are all very committed to their work in order to create a real impact through their actions. We are very proud to work in collaboration with Lighthouse Relief this year to support the psychosocial development of children attending the Child-Friendly Space. We hope that this collaboration will lead to future projects dedicated to the residents of the Ritsona refugee camp.”

- Monde Par La Main/Give a Hand

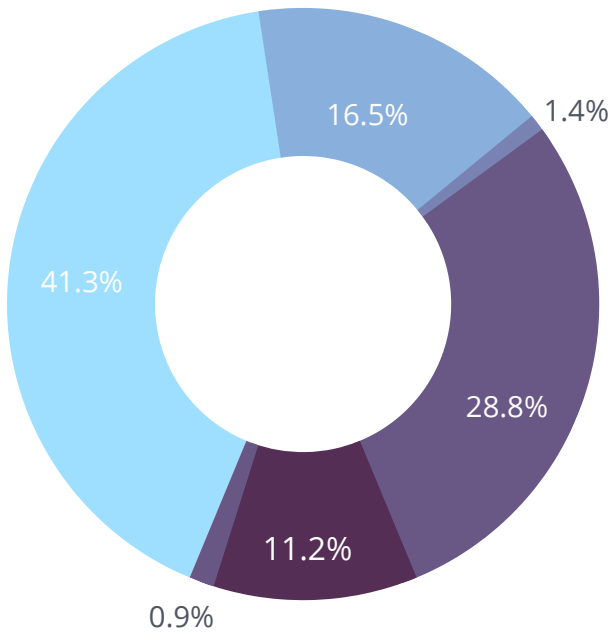
“ We're so pleased to be partnered with Lighthouse Relief. We chose them as the organisation's work is so direct and transparent and the need for help in the Athens area of Greece is more desperate than ever. Reporting is always clear and efficient and we are safe in the knowledge that our money is making it to the right place - to directly benefit the people who need it! The team are polite, open and friendly and is a pleasure to work with. Thanks for all you're doing!”

- RefugEase

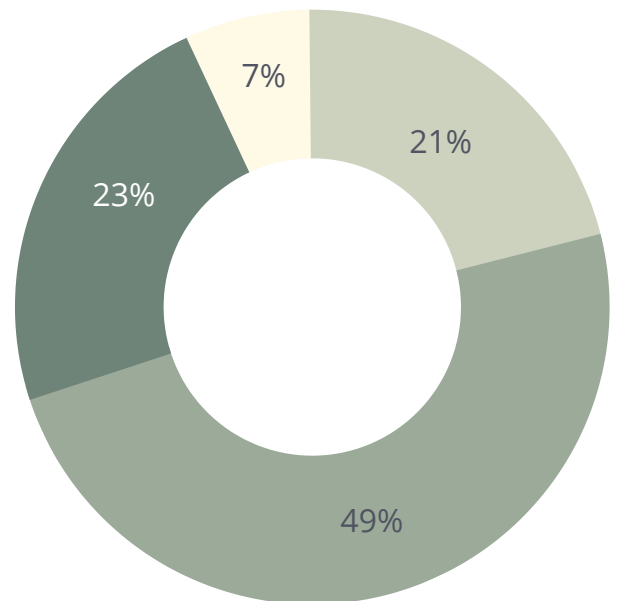
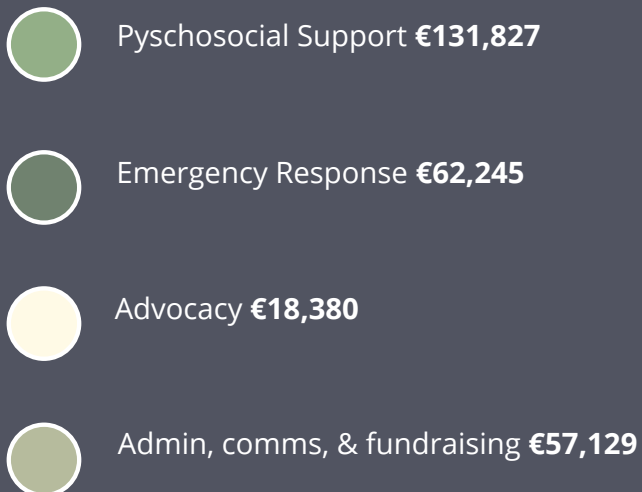


2021 | FINANCIAL OVERVIEW*

INCOME €313,887



EXPENSES €269,581



2021 | Our Thanks

Our heartfelt thanks to the foundations, partners, and individuals who supported us with monetary and in-kind contributions in 2021.

Dashlight Foundation

International Sports and Music Project

John Coates Charitable Trust

LDS Charities

RefugEase

The SOL Foundation*

Stiftungsfonds Zivile Seenotrettung (Safe Passage)

B1G1

Act For Life

*Funds reported as income in 2020, while spent between November 2020 and November 2021 because of COVID-19 related project implementation delays

Attika for Solidarity

Better Life With Refugees

FoodKIND

GlobalGiving

HumanRights360

International Committee of the

Red Cross

Meaalofa Foundation

Medical Volunteers

International

Stitching Christian Relief

Streetlights

Sunna Ali

Louis Clarke

Alexander Galimberti

Nancy & Joseph Gould

Helena Katz

Aislin Lenehan

Laura Peters

Ainab Rahman

Annemarie Slaughter

Aaron Thompson

Plus over 500 donors who contributed to our crowd-funding campaigns!

WITH YOUR HELP, WE CAN **RELIEVE THE WORST EFFECTS OF**
FORCED MIGRATION







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