



European Lawyers in Lesvos (ELIL)

Annual Report 2022

ELIL
EUROPEAN LAWYERS IN LESVOS

Six years ago, in 2016, ELIL began assisting asylum seekers in Moria camp on Lesbos. Our work was based on the belief that meaningful access to legal assistance is a fundamental right and integral to ensuring human rights are respected and the rule of law is upheld.

Our work in 2022 continues to follow this fundamental principle and we have adapted to respond to the growing needs in Greece and beyond.

We opened a new office in Thessaloniki, to support asylum seekers across Northern Greece. This includes people in the city, the surrounding camps and, particularly, the detention centres near the Turkey border. The new office complements our existing projects on Lesbos, Samos and in Athens and ensures we can assist asylum seekers throughout Greece.

This year also saw ELIL start a project outside Greece for the first time. In response to the millions of people who fled Ukraine as a result of the devastating Russian invasion, ELIL began work in Warsaw in August 2022. Our team, working closely with Polish pro bono lawyers, has provided legal information and complex case support to thousands of people in the past few months. In early 2023, ELIL also plans to start a new project in Poland, assisting refugees who have crossed the Poland-Belarus border.

ELIL's work is only possible due to the incredible work of our staff and volunteers. Our core team, along with hundreds of volunteers from across Europe, work tirelessly to provide crucial legal assistance in often challenging situations. I am incredibly grateful to them and their commitment to the belief that everyone should have a chance to live in safety, free from the threat of war and persecution.

Philip Worthington
Managing Director



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Greece saw a sharp increase in arrivals in 2022, particularly over the summer months. Almost 20,000 refugees arrived - the highest number since 2019 - with over 12,000 arriving to the Aegean islands by sea. Half were women and children, primarily from Afghanistan, Somalia and Palestine.

Since we first began working in Greece, we have witnessed the need for basic services become more entrenched, systemic and pronounced. Although six years have passed, there are still simply not enough lawyers to meet the need for legal assistance - and the situation is getting worse.

In Lesbos, there are high numbers of new arrivals and interview dates are assigned at extremely short notice - often just a few days after arrival. This means it can be particularly challenging for asylum seekers to speak to a lawyer and access the information needed to navigate the legal process before their interview. The asylum procedure prioritises speed and key safeguards – such as the vulnerability assessment – may be rushed or passed over.

On the mainland, asylum seekers face a complex legal procedure that has been exacerbated by the new online registration system. Repeated glitches and delays mean that many people are living in vulnerable and precarious situations, unable to access accommodation or medical support.

In the North of Greece, asylum seekers who cross the land border with Turkey may be arrested and often face obstacles in accessing the asylum process. The detention centres are located many hours' drive from Thessaloniki, effectively restricting access to legal assistance and other services.

Against this backdrop of new challenges, the 2021 Joint Ministerial Decision continues to apply. This effectively restricts access to the asylum procedure for a majority of refugees. Before the asylum case of someone from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan or Bangladesh can be heard, they must first overturn the assumption that Turkey is not safe for them.

In all locations across Greece, the need for legal assistance is increasing as the asylum procedure gets quicker, stricter and more complex. However, many organisations are withdrawing or downsizing. This means that, although the need is increasing, the number of lawyers is decreasing.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 led to the largest European refugee movement since World War II, with an estimated 7.8 million people fleeing Ukraine into the EU. The vast majority made their way to Poland, where 1.4 million people are registered for temporary protection.

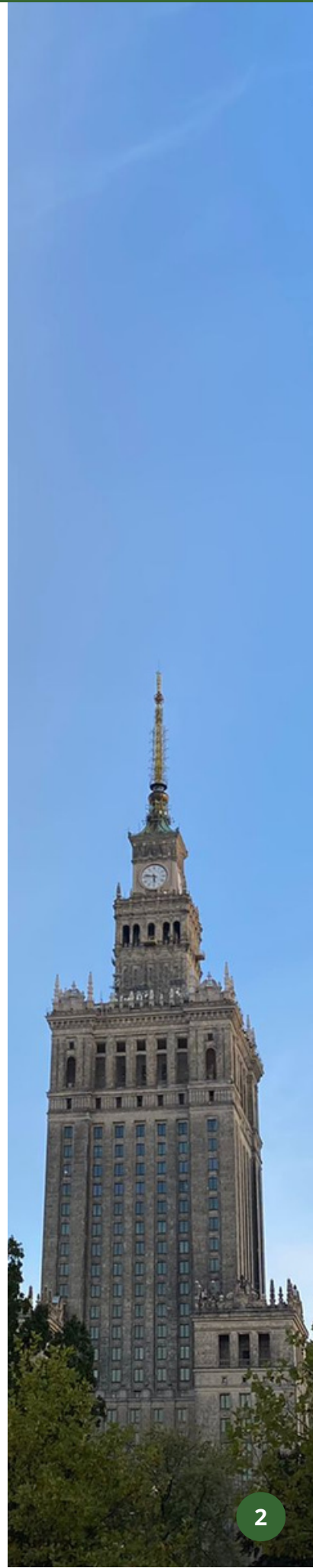
With hundreds of refugees fleeing the conflict each day, there was an urgent, unmet need for legal assistance. This included both basic legal information and assistance and specialised support for people with complex legal situations. The huge number of arrivals meant that local initiatives were overwhelmed and additional capacity was needed.

Some vulnerable groups faced particular barriers to receiving information, accessing legal procedures and obtaining temporary protection. These include third country nationals (i.e. non-Ukrainians), undocumented individuals and unaccompanied children.

UNHCR and PILnet contacted ELIL in June 2022 with a request to provide legal services in Warsaw. We conducted a needs assessment and launched the Ukraine Pro Bono Collaborative in August 2022, in partnership with six international law firms with offices in Poland (Dentons, Allen & Overy, White & Case, Norton Rose Fulbright, Hogan Lovells and Bird & Bird).

The purpose of the project is to provide high-quality legal information and assistance to people arriving from Ukraine in order to answer their legal queries, support them in accessing their rights and help them navigate the legal procedures in Poland.

In the first six months of the project, we have seen the needs evolve and grow as cases become more complex. We have increased both our capacity and the number of locations we work from in order to reach as many people as possible.



GREECE

In 2022, we continued working from our Lesvos, Samos and Athens offices and opened a new office in Thessaloniki. In total, we assisted 3,052 people.

The team in Athens provided legal assistance in the city and the surrounding region. ELIL's lawyers and interpreters conduct one-on-one consultations from the office, as well as travelling to various camps, detention centres and shelters/community centres in the region to provide on-site assistance.

WHERE WE WORK



With arrivals to Lesvos high and few legal organisations remaining on the island, the team focused on assisting as many people as possible in the extremely short time before their interview. Working both in Mavrovouni camp and from our office in Mytilene, we provided tailored, one-on-one assistance, conducted regular group legal information sessions and provided a space for drop-in questions. This was crucial in enabling asylum seekers to access key information, prepare for their interview and ask questions about the asylum procedure, their rights and obligations. Although arrivals to Samos were lower, we sent teams to the island to assist when needed.

In May 2022, ELIL established a new office in Thessaloniki to address a growing need for legal support for refugees in the north of the country. Together with our Athens office, this has allowed ELIL to form a crucial link between the islands and mainland, follow cases between locations and provide comprehensive support throughout the procedure. Our team assist cases from our office in the city as well as in camps and detention centres across the surrounding region.



Interview preparation

Our primary activity in 2022 was providing legal advice to help people prepare for their first instance asylum interview. In total, we assisted 1,414 people with this crucial aspect of the procedure. In each case, we aimed to provide at least two one-on-one consultations, unless the case was an emergency with a very short deadline. In almost all cases we also represented the asylum seeker at interview and/or submitted a supporting legal memorandum.

Family Reunification

We supported 47 people in filing applications for reunification with family members in other EU member states. In general, this involved liaising with the asylum seeker and family members, collecting relevant documents, preparing the application and a supporting legal memorandum and following up with the Dublin Unit in Greece and other countries.

Drop-in queries

Drop-in queries are an important part of ELIL's work. They help answer legal questions, both in person at our offices and over the duty phone. This flexible option allows people to seek support at their convenience. In total, we assisted 1,472 asylum seekers with such queries.

Detention

We significantly increased our support to asylum seekers in detention during 2022, primarily in the north of Greece. Our lawyers help detained individuals to lodge an application for asylum and provide expert legal assistance in relation to the asylum procedure. We also challenge continued detention after an asylum application is lodged and support with age assessment claims for unaccompanied children in detention.

“ “ ———

If I had not had access to a lawyer, I might still be living in an uncertain situation in a closed camp. There was no one else to help with my asylum procedure.

” ”

Refugee from Afghanistan



LEGAL INFO SESSIONS

“ “ ———

“We organise group legal information sessions to inform refugees about the asylum system. The sessions are organised based on country of origin, but participants have diverse backgrounds. As lawyers, we pay the utmost attention to respecting the principle of confidentiality for each individual.” - Christina, Greek Asylum Lawyer

————— ” ”

In response to a sustained need for legal assistance for new arrivals, who are often called to attend their interviews at extremely short notice, in 2022 the ELIL team on Lesbos conducted regular group legal info sessions. These sessions involved groups of around 15 people. Those attending received key legal information and had the opportunity to ask important questions about the asylum procedure, their rights and obligations. They were followed up by one-on-one legal consultations.

Unaccompanied children

We provided individualised legal support to unaccompanied children, particularly those who were registered as adults.

This included challenging the original age registration for children recorded as adults (gathering relevant evidence and obtaining referrals for age determination), providing information and advice regarding the legal procedure and assisting with family reunification applications

In total, we assisted 119 unaccompanied children. Of these, 23 were assisted with age assessment, 55 with asylum interview preparation, 15 with family reunification and 26 with other queries. We also assisted 744 children who arrived in Greece with their family members, either with interview preparations, family reunification requests or drop-in queries.

Mobile Support and Cooperation

Over the past year, we have increased our ability to provide remote and mobile legal assistance, with staff providing legal support in camps and community centres in and around Athens and Thessaloniki.

In early 2022, we launched a collaboration with Action for Women in Athens, an NGO supporting refugee and asylum-seeking women's recovery, resilience and re-integration. In June, our teams began offering consultations and answering drop-in queries, one day a week, at the One Happy Family "Victoria Community Center" in Athens. We also began a collaboration with the Apostoli shelter for unaccompanied children, supporting all of the children accommodated there with their legal cases.

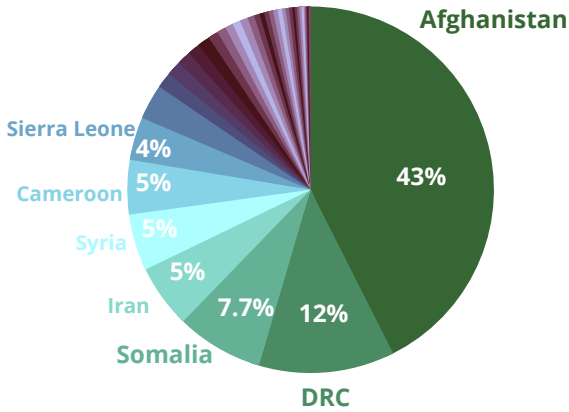


She [my lawyer] was not the one telling my story, but she guided me in order to put my story in the right way for them to understand

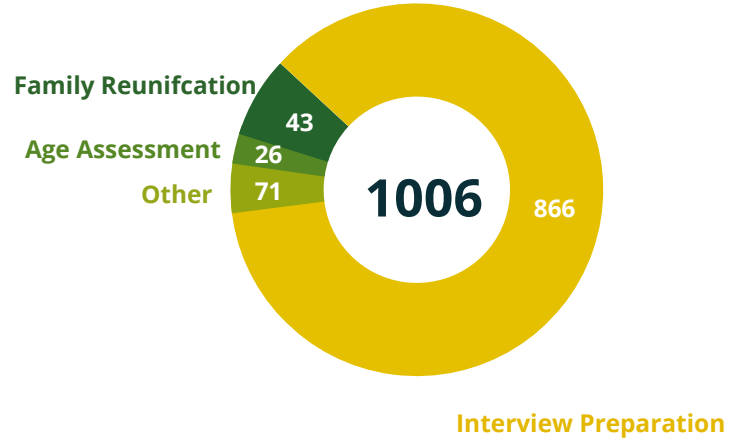
Refugee from Nigeria



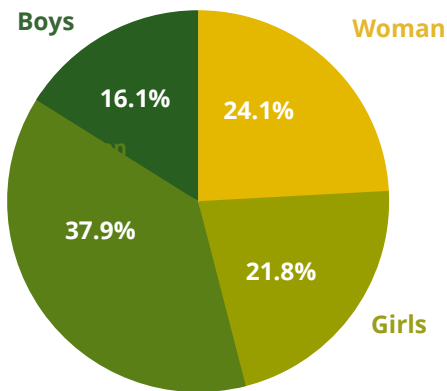
NATIONALITIES



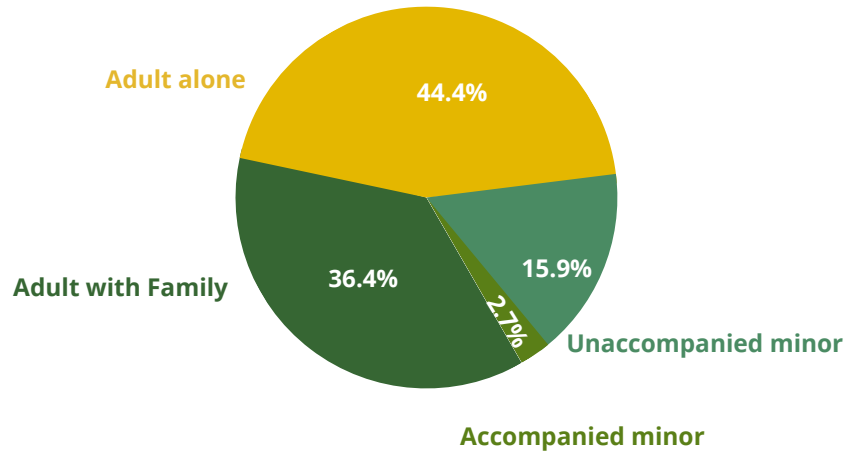
CASES



DEMOGRAPHICS

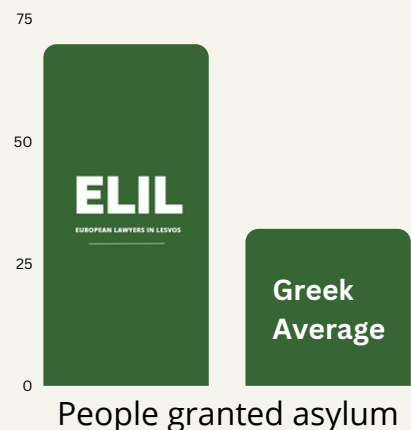


FAMILY SITUATIONS



ELIL Greece assisted 3,052 people in 2022, working on 1,006 cases

Our work has a real impact since 2019, **69.7%** of those we have assisted have been granted asylum, compared to the Greek average of **32%**.



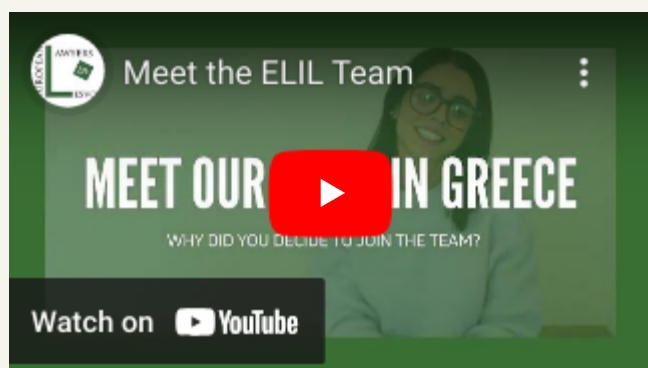


Legal Assistance for Refugees at EU borders

Discover the importance of legal assistance and hear testimonies from applicants who have benefited from our support. Gain insights into the impactful work of ELIL through perspectives shared by our staff.

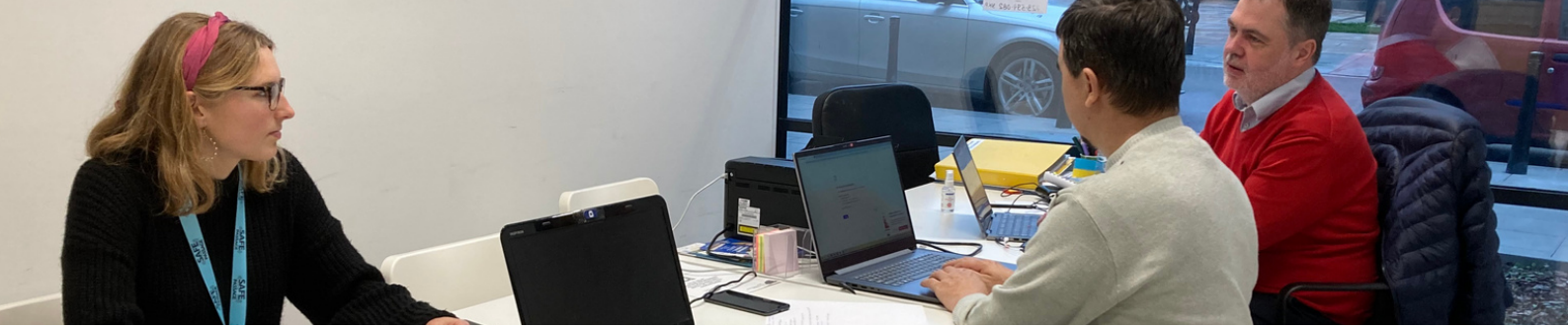
ELIL Poland Project

In August 2022, ELIL initiated project in Warsaw, providing essential legal aid, including both basic and specialised support, to refugees arriving from Ukraine. Witness the impactful work of our team as featured in this video.



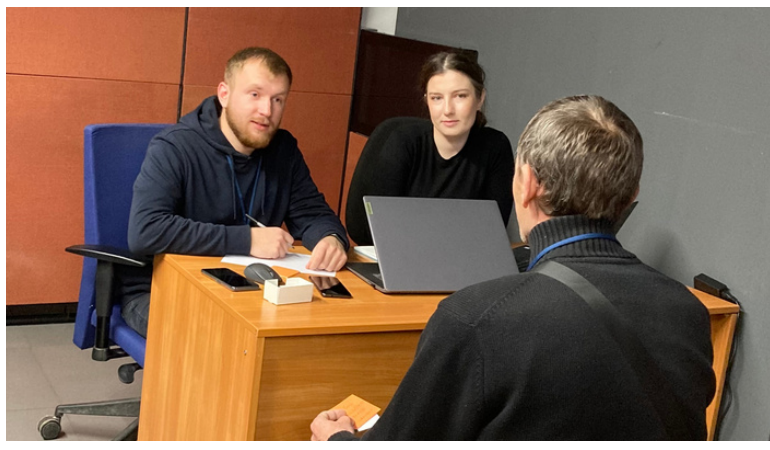
Meet our Team in Greece

Get to know the people who have joined our team at ELIL. Hear their personal motivations and stories as they share their commitment to providing essential legal assistance to asylum seekers. Discover their ambition in this video.



POLAND

In 2022, the ELIL project in Poland provided free legal assistance to 2,091 refugees arriving from Ukraine. Our pro-bono lawyers work from closed, confidential offices in three locations across Warsaw, including the UNHCR Blue Dot and two reception centres.



They provide legal information, assistance and advice on a variety of topics (including legal stay in Poland (residency permits/re-applying for UKR status), access to temporary protection/asylum, cross-border movement and children's rights/guardianship). We have a particular focus on complex cases, especially those of third country nationals (i.e. non-Ukrainians), undocumented individuals, and unaccompanied and separated children. Cases with protection needs, such as survivors of trafficking, survivors of gender-based violence or individuals needing mental health and psychosocial support, are referred to specialised organisations either in the Blue Dot or locally in Warsaw.

The ELIL project has received a wide range of legal queries, including rights of beneficiaries of temporary protection, legal stay in Poland, cross-border movement, guardianship of separated children, housing and employment rights, legalisation of documents and finding relatives.



People Assisted

2091



Pro Bono Lawyers

25+



Locations

5

BOARD

In October 2022, ELIL's Supervisory Board visited our offices in Athens and Lesvos. ELIL staff and volunteers in both locations sat down with board members and shared their perspective on the work that we do and the context in which it takes place.



The Supervisory Board includes:

- Berit Reiss-Andersen (Chair) (Chair of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, Norwegian lawyer and former President of the Norwegian Bar Association)
- Dr Margarete von Galen (former President of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE))
- Dr Annette Mutschler-Siebert (Vice Chair) (Board Member of the Deutscher Anwaltverein (DAV))
- Laurence Roques (Head of the Conseil National des Barreaux Human Rights Committee (CNB)).

They were accompanied by Jacques Taquet (Head of the Committee on European and International Affairs of the CNB) and Anna Smolińska (Legal Advisor Migration Affairs of the CCBE).

STAFF

Our staff expanded considerably during the year, with the addition of Thessaloniki and Warsaw-based teams. The Thessaloniki team consists of a Project Officer and a Greek Asylum Lawyer, while the Warsaw team includes a Legal Coordinator, a Project Coordinator and two Ukrainian/Russian-Polish Interpreters. In Greece, we also welcomed an additional lawyer and a Somali interpreter to the team.

In total, we have 30 staff. Their exceptional commitment has allowed us to expand across – and beyond - Greece, adapt to a shifting need and provide vital legal assistance to thousands of refugees at EU borders.



VOLUNTEERS

In 2022, our operations in Greece and Poland were supported by over 130 in-person volunteers. This marked the return to full in-person capacity after Covid-19 pandemic.

The Greece Pro Bono Collaborative, a partnership between ELIL and six international law firms (Allen & Overy, Ashurst, Charles Russell Speechlys, Dentons, Orrick and White & Case), supported with pro bono lawyers who are seconded to ELIL for two weeks at a time.

In Poland, through the Ukraine Pro Bono Collaborative, pro bono lawyers from six law firms (Dentons, Allen & Overy, White & Case, Norton Rose Fulbright, Hogan Lovells and Bird & Bird) provided legal assistance to refugees arriving from Ukraine.

Together, these pro bono partnerships have provided ELIL with more than 100 volunteers this year.



Volunteer asylum lawyers from across Europe support our work in Greece and legal assistants assist our asylum lawyers with research, interview preparation related tasks and other follow-up tasks.

ELIL is immensely grateful for the support of all our volunteers, who make our work possible.

A person wearing a purple headscarf and a purple jacket is sitting on a wooden bench with concrete legs. They are facing away from the camera, looking out over a body of blue water. The ground is dirt and there are some rocks. The title 'BEYOND THE NUMBERS' is overlaid in large white letters across the top of the image.

BEYOND THE NUMBERS

Assisting an Unaccompanied Child in Detention

The ELIL Athens team was contacted by an unaccompanied child in detention. The boy had recently arrived in Greece and was living alone on the street. He was stopped by the police and, because he was not carrying the required documents, was placed in a detention centre. He tried to inform authorities that he was a child and presented his Afghan ID but, with no interpretation available, he was incorrectly registered as an adult. After weeks spent living in traumatic conditions in an adult detention facility, the child contacted ELIL. Following a visit to the detention centre, our lawyer informed authorities of his age and his wish to apply for asylum. The ELIL team liaised with the asylum office to prioritise his release, accompanied the child when he submitted his ID and informed him about the asylum process and his rights.

On the day of the registration, the asylum service officially recognised him as a child and ELIL worked with the authorities to ensure his immediate transfer from detention to a shelter for unaccompanied children. Without the support of a lawyer, it would have been almost impossible for the boy to prove his age, apply for asylum and leave the dangerous confines of the adult detention centre. We continue to support the child with his on-going asylum application.

Supporting a survivor of trafficking

ELIL assisted a vulnerable woman from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The applicant, who was the survivor of an international trafficking network, arrived on Samos in February 2020. Due to several serious medical conditions, she was referred for her asylum procedure on the mainland.

The woman contacted ELIL through the organisation responsible for her housing. An ELIL lawyer liaised with the asylum service and the interview was rescheduled based on her medical needs. ELIL provided preparation, represented the applicant during her interview and submitted a legal memo to support her case.

A few weeks later, she received a positive decision. Our lawyer supported her in obtaining all the necessary documents and referred her to actors providing social services so that she could receive assistance with her resettlement and financial aid from the state based on her medical condition.

ELIL's work in 2022 was made possible by the generosity of its partners and supporters. We are extremely grateful for the enduring support of Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), Comic Relief, the Safe Passage Foundation, the Fred Foundation, the Fondation Abbé Pierre, the Ho Foundation, JUSACA and Bar Associations and Law Societies across Europe.

Our pro bono collaborations with international law firms continued and strengthened – the Greece Pro Bono Collaborative entered its fourth year and the new Ukraine Pro Bono Collaborative was crucial to our work in Poland. We are extremely grateful for their on-going support.

We were also delighted to start new partnerships with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and the Bernard Lewis Family Charitable Trust.

In spring, thanks to generous contributions from KIND, the Ho Foundation, the Safe Passage Foundation and UMCOR, we launched a new project in Thessaloniki to help meet the high demand for legal assistance for refugees in northern Greece. In August, ELIL launched a new project in Poland to support refugees fleeing Ukraine. Funding from the UPBC and KIND facilitated a successful three-month pilot phase, while additional support from the UPBC, KIND and UMCOR allowed us to continue and expand our work.

ELIL has continued its partnership with the legal tech companies BRYTER and HighQ, thanks to whom we have been able to increase our effectiveness and reach more people in need of legal assistance.

ELIL received support from the following Bar Associations and Law Societies in 2022:

- CCBE
- German Bar Association (DAV)
- French Bar Association (CNB)
- Andorra Bar Association
- Austrian Bar Association
- Danish Bar Association
- Finland Bar Association
- Law Society Of Ireland
- Law Society Of Northern Ireland
- Liechtenstein Bar Association
- Norwegian Bar Association
- Ordre des avocats vaudois
- Slovenian Bar Association
- Swiss Bar Association
- West Vlaanderen Bar Association





03/2022: ELIL joined other NGOs in calling for Greece to abolish the legislative regulation that imposes a fee of 100 euros for access to asylum. The fee applies to the 2nd and every subsequent application, including those made by minors seeking international protection. [READ HERE](#)



03/2022: ELIL co-signed a letter urging the European Commission to take prompt action against Greece to ensure the thorough examination of safe third country asylum applications and protect the integrity of the Common European Asylum System. [READ HERE](#)



07/2022: ELIL joined other civil society organisations in asking the Greek government to address the precarious situation of unaccompanied children applying for asylum, calling on the government to establish a special residence permit for all unaccompanied children and for those below the age of 22.

[READ HERE](#)



08/2022: LGBTQI+ asylum seekers face specific challenges upon arrival in Greece, where they often struggle to access key services and navigate a complex asylum system. ELIL joined 36 other NGOs and civil society organisations in highlighting these challenges and calling on the Greek government to take concrete steps towards addressing them.

[READ HERE](#)



09/2022: ELIL joined ECRE and 61 other NGOs and civil society organisations in stating a strong opposition to the use of the concept of 'instrumentalisation' and its codification in EU law. Believing that the regulation would reduce protection levels for refugees in a way that is unnecessary, disproportionate, and counter-productive, they are calling on Member States to opt for fair reforms that support asylum systems in functioning effectively. [READ HERE](#)

TOTAL INCOME 2022

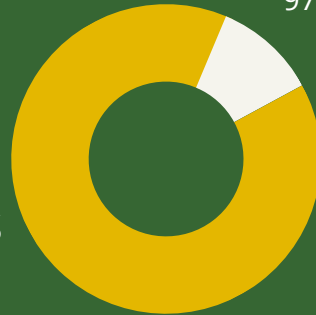
906,607.18 EUR

Donations

97,720.24

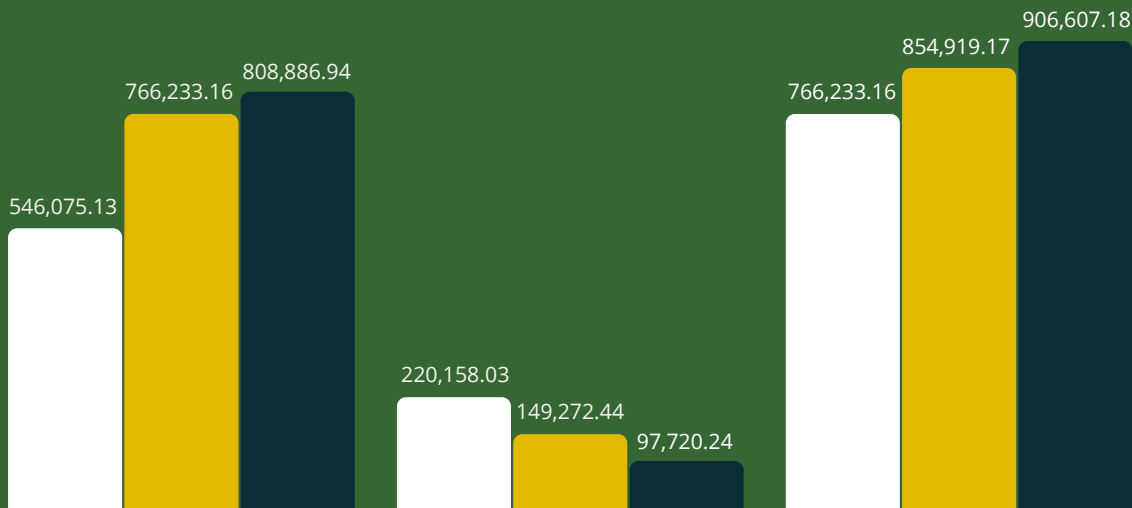
Grants

808,886.94



INCOME PER YEAR

■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022



Grants

Donations

Total

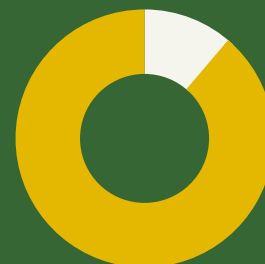
EXPENDITURE 2022

957,291.76 EUR

The difference between income and expenditure is covered through the use of ELIL reserves. These are kept with a view to ensure the organisation's sustainability and are to be used for the implementation of our programmes.

Support costs

12.1%



Programme costs

87.9%



THANK YOU FROM THE **ELIL** TEAM

