

**ANNUAL  
REPORT 2025**

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**LEGAL  
CENTRE  
LESVOS**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Throughout 2025, increasingly punitive anti-migrant measures were enacted into law in Greece, including the unlawful and discriminatory three-month suspension of the right to seek asylum for those arriving to Greece from the African continent, and a new deportation law that makes it a crime to simply be undocumented. At the same time, construction has nearly finished on the EU-funded Vastria detention centre on Lesbos island, now expected to open in 2026, with an estimated capacity of over 5000 - making it by far the largest migrant detention centre in Greece and a sign of the shift toward large-scale, isolated detention of people on the move envisioned under the EU Pact on Migration.

Despite this hostile climate, the Legal Centre Lesbos made significant advances over the year. All six LCL clients who stood trial this year were acquitted, after being wrongfully accused of smuggling or causing shipwrecks. After nearly two years of joint legal advocacy by a coalition of lawyers including the LCL, 21 Hellenic Coast Guard officers are facing criminal charges for the state crime of Pylos, in an historic step towards accountability. And in December, one of the “Pylos 9” we have represented since 2023 was finally granted refugee status, more than two and a half years after surviving the Pylos massacre and being wrongfully accused, setting important precedent for other survivors in a climate where most Egyptian asylum seekers have their asylum claims rejected as Greece considers Egypt a “safe” country of origin.

This year we also filed two new cases before the European Court of Human Rights, including representing the family of a man tortured and abandoned at sea during a pushback, who later died of his injuries, and made filings before the court in three additional LCL cases pending at the ECtHR since 2020 and 2021.

We continued our open door policy at our office in Lesbos, providing crucial legal information and representation to hundreds of people on the move trapped in Lesbos, to detained asylum seekers, to undocumented migrants

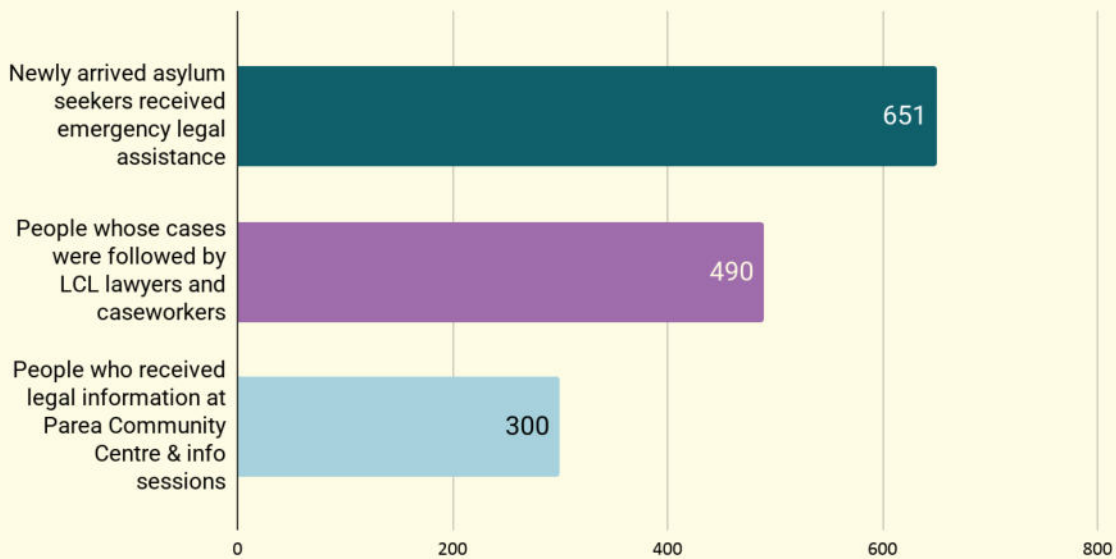
regularizing their status and to recognized refugees seeking to reunify with family members, including 15 Palestinians who have families trapped in Gaza amidst the ongoing genocide.

In parallel, we operated a seven-day-a-week hotline providing emergency legal assistance to newly arrived migrants, ensuring their access to emergency medical assistance, the asylum procedure, and protection from unlawful expulsion. Through this work, the European Court of Human Rights granted interim measures in a case filed by the LCL, preventing the unlawful removal of migrants recently arrived on Symi island.

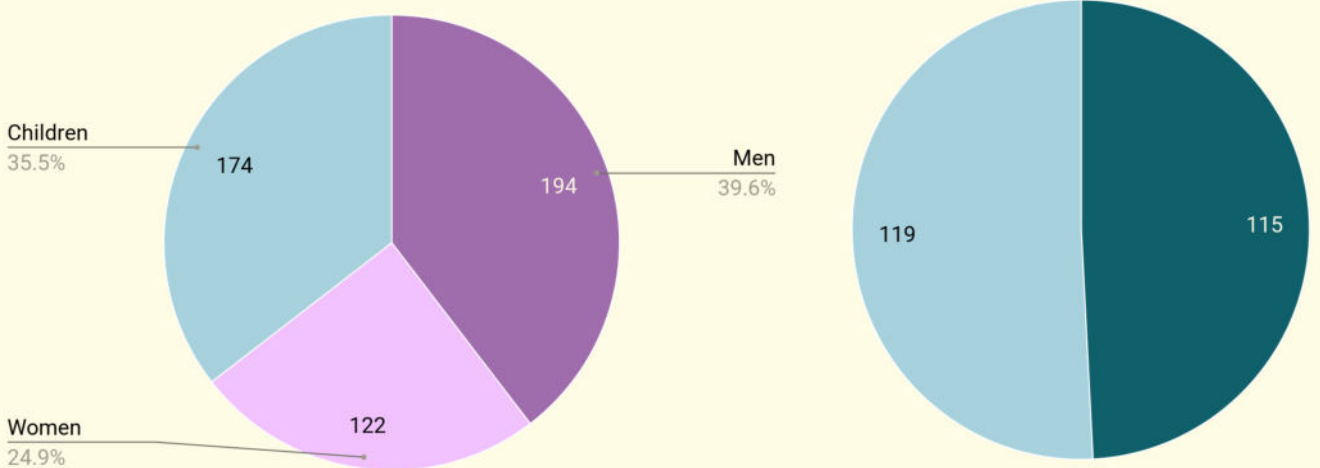
These achievements are the result of experience we have built over nearly a decade, continued collaboration with other organisations and communities in Lesvos and throughout Europe. We continue this work in a climate of increased risk of criminalisation of solidarity, limited access to funds, and escalating politically fabricated crises globally.

# CASE MANAGEMENT AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE

## 1,441 PEOPLE SUPPORTED



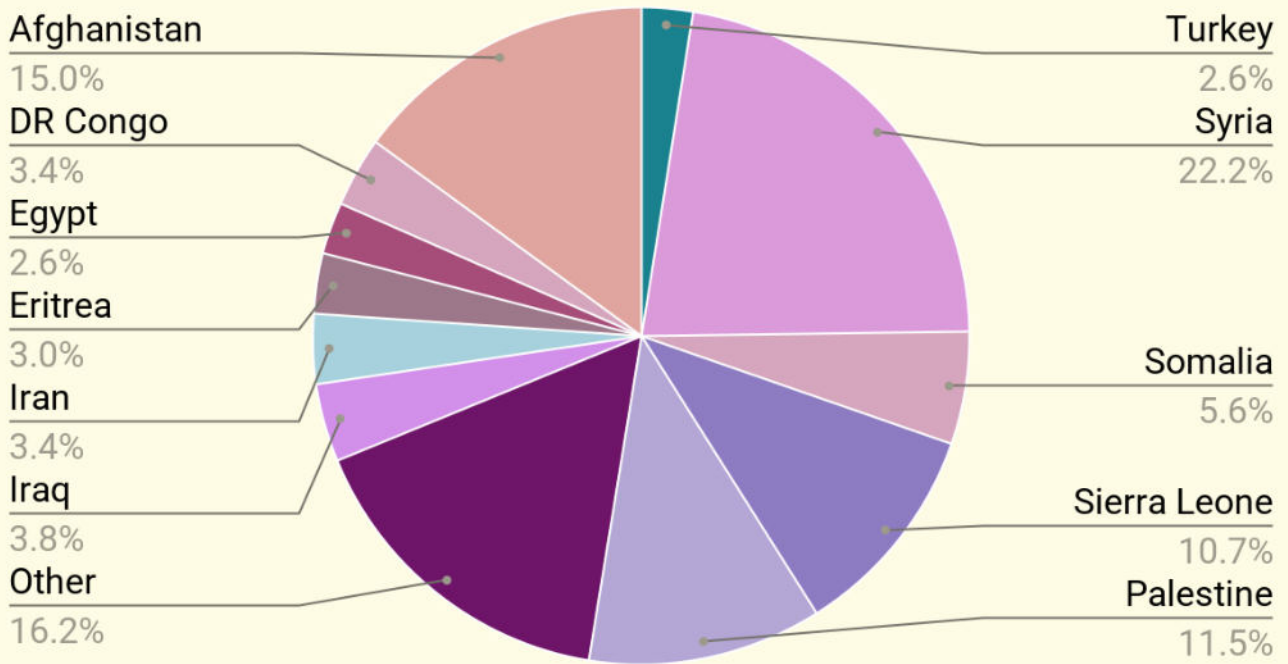
## DEMOGRAPHICS OF CASES\*



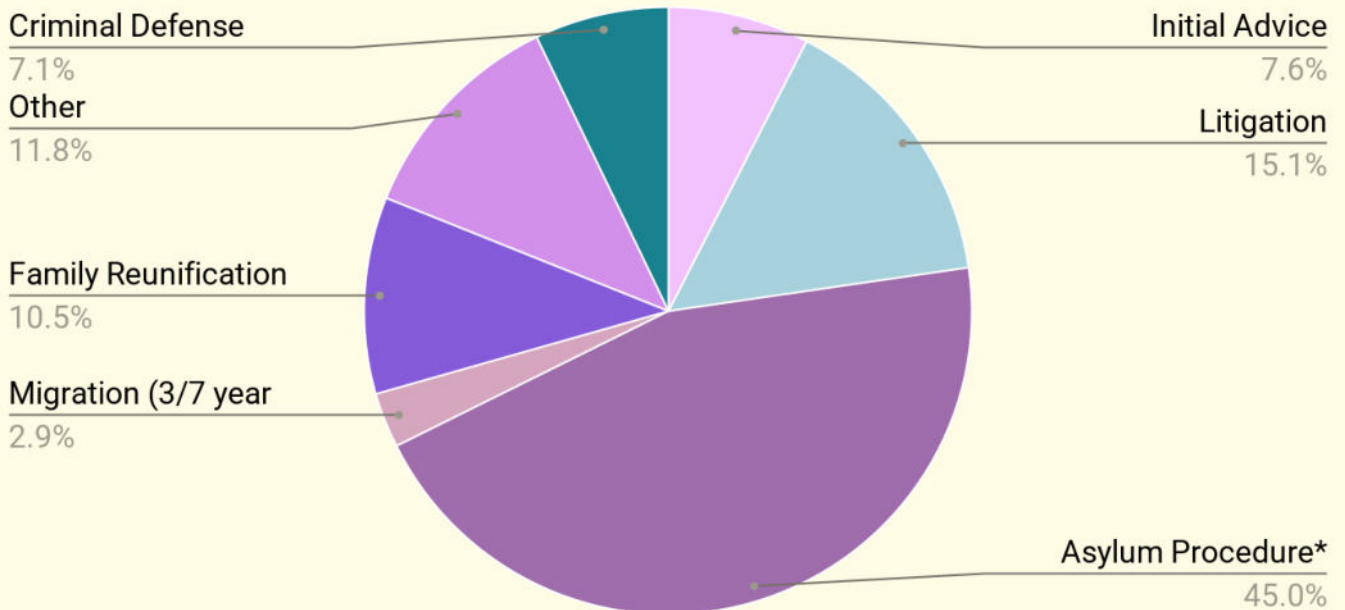
\*Demographics of the 234 cases followed by the LCL in 2025, which when accounting for all family members includes a total of 490 people. These demographics do not include those who received emergency legal assistance or who attended information sessions.

- New cases in 2025
- Cases followed from previous years

## COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



## SERVICES PROVIDED



\*Includes legal support provided during all stages of the asylum procedure: first instance, appeals, administrative court and those detained on administrative grounds.

# DEFENCE OF CRIMINALISED MIGRANTS

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The LCL has taken on criminal defence in cases of migrants who are charged with crimes related to their flight or their legal status as migrants. These cases have included defending alleged migrant 'boat drivers' charged with smuggling, migrants charged with causing shipwrecks when apprehended at sea by the Coast Guard, particularly in cases where no shipwreck occurred or was, in fact, caused by the Coast Guard, individuals charged with illegal stay under the new criminal provision, and individuals arrested attempting to leave or travel to Lesvos with false documents. In 2025, all six LCL clients who faced trial were acquitted.

3

people charged  
with boat driving  
acquitted in first  
instance trial

1

person charged with  
attempting to cause  
a shipwreck acquitted  
on appeal

2

people charged  
with attempting to  
cause shipwreck  
acquitted in first  
instance trial

## CASE SPOTLIGHT

### **Falsely Accused Refugee Acquitted; Coast Guard Investigation Launched**

In September 2024, A.H., a Palestinian refugee from Gaza, was arrested after the migrant boat he was traveling on from Turkey to Greece was violently intercepted by the Hellenic Coast Guard. After spending six months in pre-trial detention, in February 2025 he was brought to trial in Mytilene on charges of unauthorised transport of people to Greece (smuggling), causing a shipwreck, and disobedience. Represented by the Legal Centre Lesbos, he was fully acquitted of all charges, by the Mytilene Three-Member Felony Appeal Court.

Our defense strategically highlighted the violence of the coast guard documented in witness testimonies, including firing live ammunition, ramming the migrant boat, and severely beating survivors, including our client. We also argued that prosecuting a refugee for crimes related to his own entry to Greece violated the Geneva Convention and Greek law. Crucially, the key coast guard witnesses who had accused A.H. failed to appear, and the court rejected their written statements.

A.H.'s acquittal not only vindicated A.H., but within the criminal proceedings, the court also referred the case to the Greek Naval Court in order to investigate the coast guard officers for torturing A.H., setting an important precedent in the fight against impunity for border violence.

# LITIGATION AGAINST BORDER VIOLENCE

In order to combat the Greek and EU policies that lead to violations of human rights, border violence, criminalization of migration and solidarity, and to defend the fundamental rights of migrants trapped in 'hotspot' camps, the Legal Centre Lesvos continues to engage in litigation before both Greek and international fora. In 2025, the Legal Centre Lesvos took on legal representation in a variety of cases in defence of migrant rights, which were litigated before Greek Courts, the European Court of Human Rights (ECTHR) and different international institutions, with the following accomplishments throughout the year:

**2** new applications filed before European Court of Human Rights in representation of survivors & surviving family members of pushback operations

European Court of Human Rights grants interim measures to group of unregistered asylum seekers in Symi island

**2** friendly settlements agreements reached in cases before European Court of Human Rights regarding denial of medical care and inadequate living conditions during COVID pandemic - meaning that our clients received compensation from the Greek state.

**4** complaints filed in Greek court in representation of migrants subjected to state violence

**21** Hellenic Coast Guard officers and commanders face criminal charges related to Pylos shipwreck following objections by LCL and other actors, reversing a decision that had archived the case regarding 4 high ranked officers

European Ombudsman calls for reform of European Commission's funding to Greece border operations following complaint by LCL and other actors

## CASE HIGHLIGHTS

### **European Ombudsperson Calls for Reform in EU Funding**

In February 2025, the European Ombudsperson concluded an inquiry into the European Commission's funding of Greece's border operations, initiated after a 2023 complaint by Legal Centre Lesvos, de:border migrant justice collective, HIAS, ERBB, and Mobile Info Team. While the EO did not find the Commission guilty of maladministration, it **recommended reforms** to improve oversight, transparency, and civil society involvement in border funding.

### **European Court grants interim measures in the case of new arrivals in Symi island**

In June 2025, the European Court of Human Rights **granted interim measures** filed by the Legal Centre Lesvos in representation of 29 Afghan migrants, including families with young children, who had arrived on Symi Island and were in urgent need of emergency medical assistance and who feared refoulement to Turkey. Recognising the imminent risk the migrants faced, the Court specifically ordered Greece to locate the group, to refrain from removing them from Greece, and to provide food, water, medical care, and access to asylum procedures. Despite this, the Hellenic Coast Guard detained them in appalling conditions for nearly a week, denying them basic necessities and legal support, before they were finally registered as asylum seekers.

### **Criminal Charges Brought Against Coast Guard Leadership in Historic Decision**

In November 2025, after nearly two years of joint legal advocacy by a coalition of lawyers and organisations, including LCL, and objections filed with the court in June 2025, 21 Hellenic Coast Guard officers are **facing criminal charges** for the state crime of Pylos, in an historic step towards accountability. In December, one of the "Pylos 9", who we have represented since 2023 was finally granted refugee status - more than two and a half years after surviving the Pylos massacre and being wrongfully accused of causing the shipwreck. After the full acquittal of the Pylos 9 in May 2024, our client is the first of the nine to be granted refugee status, setting an important precedent.

# ADVOCACY & CAMPAIGNS

The Legal Centre Lesvos continues to document and regularly report about the situation for migrants in Lesvos and Greece, as well as advocate against the systemic human rights violations and abuses people on the move face as a result of racist, discriminatory migration policies implemented in Greece and the European Union, regularly engaging with human rights organisations and civil society on a range of issues in order to advance migrant rights.



Natasha presenting at de:criminalize event, "Freedom of Movement in Times of Authoritarian Shifts"



Vasilis at the Migreurop Assembly in Morocco

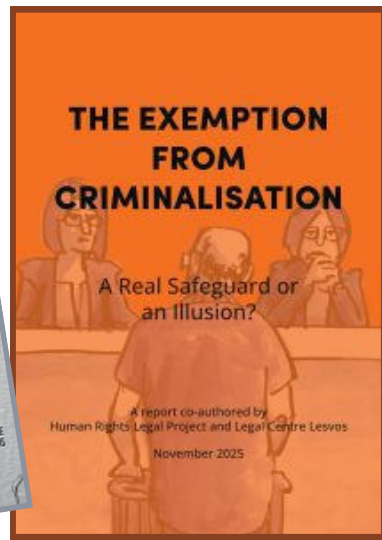
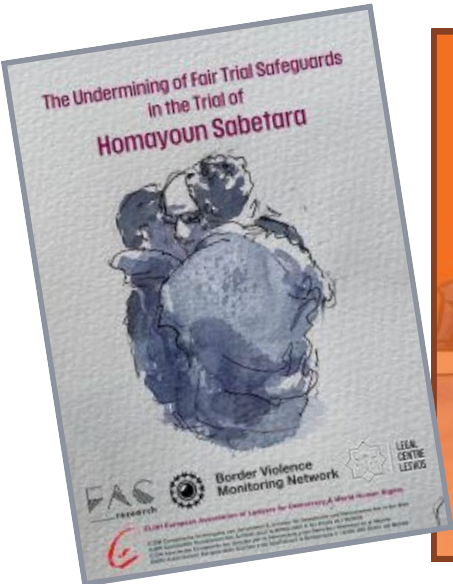


Weekly presence in Parea Community Centre



Lorraine taking part in Fons Catala conference, Mon Local Refugi

## REPORTS



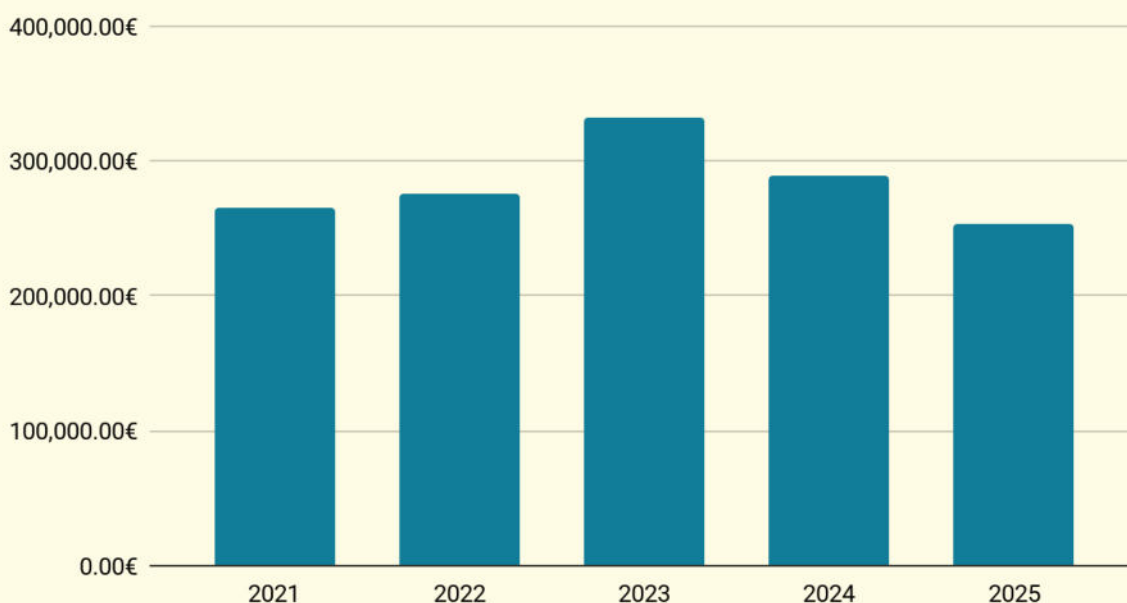
# MANAGEMENT AND FINANCES OF LEGAL CENTRE LESVOS

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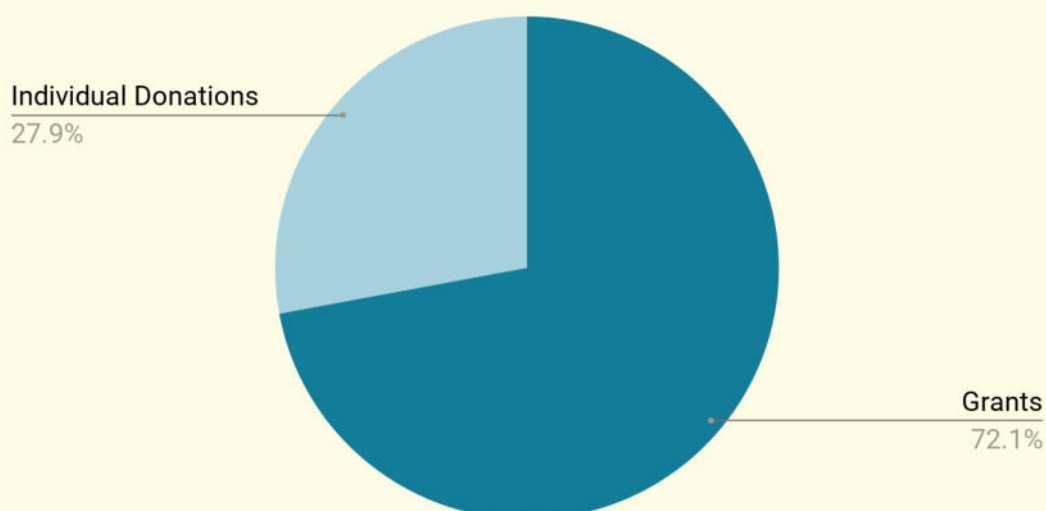
The Legal Centre Lesvos is a civil non-profit organisation registered in Greece, operating as a collectively structured organization made up of lawyers, interpreters, and human rights defenders who aim to carry responsibility collectively and through consensus. There is no hierarchy of pay scale; lawyers, interpreters, etc. all have the same salary. The management of the Legal Centre Lesvos is administered through a General Assembly, made up of five unpaid Partners, two of whom are jointly designated by the Partners as legal representatives.

In 2025, the Legal Centre Lesvos employed three Greek attorneys and three individuals working in coordination, outreach and interpretation, and had independent service contracts with one Greek attorney providing legal services and three freelancers working in international litigation, research and advocacy. The Legal Centre also continues to operate with the support of trained volunteers, supporting litigation, advocacy, interpretation, and case management.

## LCL BUDGET OVER LAST FIVE YEARS



## SOURCES OF FUNDING

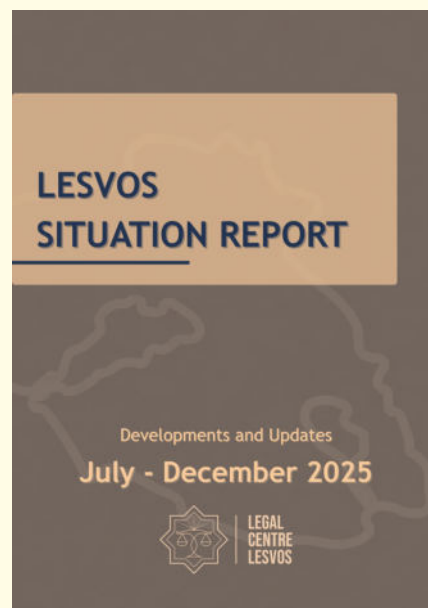
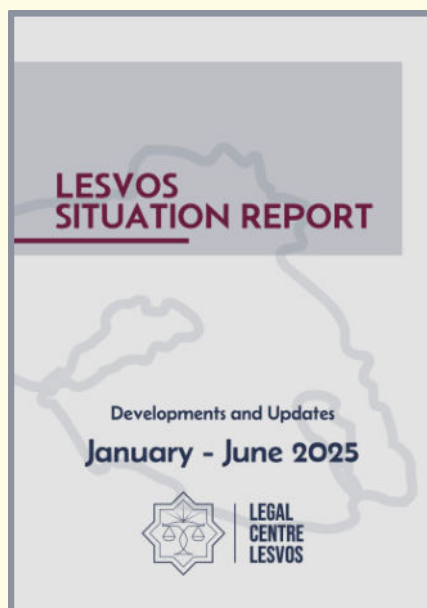


The Legal Centre operates with the exclusive support of individual donations and from entities that are not complicit in human rights or environmental abuses, and does not accept funds from any State, the European Union, or any EU entities. The LCL was funded in 2025 through the following entities:

Source of Funding	% of Budget	Amount
Medico International	19.72%	50,000.00 €
La Garriga Societat Civil / Fons Català de Cooperació	15.25%	38,675.60 €
Global Fund for Human Rights	13.40%	33,965.46 €
SolidariTee	7.44%	18,865.75 €
Rosa Luxemburg Foundation	4.69%	11,884.50 €
Antipode Foundation	4.40%	11,161.40 €
Leave No One Behind	3.94%	10,000.00 €
Durham University	1.65%	4,181.32 €
Frontline Defenders	1.28%	3,235.00 €
De:criminalize	0.31%	782.63 €
Individual donations collected via forRefugees	14.64%	37,116.61 €
Unrestricted, individual donations	13.28%	33,669.35 €
<b>Total Operating Expenses 2025</b>		<b>253,537.62 €</b>

## LEARN MORE

Further details of the Legal Centre Lesvos' work and the political context in which we worked in 2025 can be found on our website and in our regularly published Lesvos Situation Reports.



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