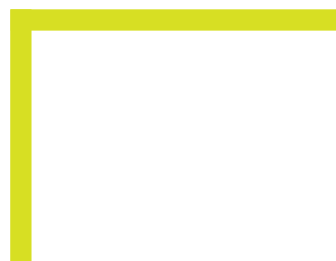




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European Council
on Refugees and Exiles

**ECRE
ANNUAL
REPORT
ON**



2020

ACTIVITY 1: LEGAL SUPPORT AND LITIGATION

1. To achieve legal changes advancing the rights of refugees and those in need of or benefiting from international protection in Europe through proactive, coordinated and needs-based litigation at a regional and international level.

2. To strengthen and support the relevant work of asylum lawyers across Europe.

Legal Support

In 2020 ECRE's Legal Support and Litigation work focused on supporting the ELENA network (a network of 500+ asylum lawyers) and ECRE members' lawyers, who were at the forefront providing legal counselling and mounting legal challenges, particularly linked to COVID-19. ECRE's support was required due to the numerous additional challenges faced by lawyers during the pandemic and the indispensability of support by international alliances during this difficult time.

The ELENA network coordinated by ECRE responded to over 80 legal queries, including cross-border representation of vulnerable individuals in need of protection related to family reunification, access to asylum, and unlawful expulsion practices. Some cases related to key legal issues in a specific country and would have been dropped without the urgent pro bono assistance of the network's lawyers in another country, where an applicant or their family member needed to pursue their cases. ECRE facilitated contacts between lawyers in such cases and provided them with relevant legal arguments. Separately, ECRE responded directly to 70 legal requests from the ELENA members. These included arguments related to exclusion from international protection, removals on national security grounds, and remote personal asylum interviews due to COVID-19.

ECRE was involved in discussions with legal partners from across Europe on the best legal strategies to employ when challenging violence and lack of access to protection at the borders; disembarkation following SAR; unlawful detention; summary returns; and disproportionate and discriminatory COVID-19 related measures.

On top of argumentation and strategic advice, ECRE provided lawyers from Hungary, Greece and Malta with emergency litigation grants covering legal, judicial and travel fees to enable legal challenges before the EU Court of Justice (CJEU), the European Court of Human Rights (EctHR), UN mechanisms, and domestic courts. These challenges related to [detention](#) of asylum applicants at the Hungarian-Serbian border and their inability to access effective remedies against violations of their rights; legal actions before the Greek Council of State and other national courts for the annulment/suspension of the Greek Emergency Legislative Decree and related removal decisions issued; legal challenges related to SAR and disembarkation in Malta, including unlawful detention of those rescued on private vessels contracted by the Maltese government.

Advice on argumentation in legal challenges related to COVID-19 mainly concerned deprivation of liberty, Dublin, access to asylum, and reception conditions. Much of the legal support provided by ECRE related to procedural issues arising from litigation during the pandemic, e.g. online hearings, new judicial rules, and deadlines at the time of pandemic-related restrictions.

The development of the ELENA network.

ECRE improved the ELENA Forum, an on-line tool for legal practitioners where they can exchange information and seek litigation advice. 199 legal practitioners, academics and UNHCR staff from 41 European countries had access to legal support through the Forum, with 1257 legal queries on 320 topics answered. The Forum benefitted from generous support from UNHCR.

The ELENA network sees positive dynamics in national coordination with new coordinators in Austria, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Turkey, and Ukraine and a new focal point on legal requests and information sharing in France. National coordinators responded to +80 legal requests, took on numerous individual cases upon request of their counterparts in other countries, provided testimonies in the domestic context, and referred on cases to other national lawyers.

The network held its first online coordinators meeting, organised by ECRE and attended by 33 national coordinators. The meeting included a discussion of litigation initiatives linked to COVID-19 and

potential ELENA follow-up, an update on CJEU jurisprudence, and a consultation on ELENA needs, priorities and activities for 2021.

Finally, through the ELENA Weekly Legal Update, ECRE regularly provided information on legal developments across Europe. 43 issues were published in 2020 and the EWLU readership reached an audience of 5,720 subscribers, a 10% increase comparing to 2019.

ECRE's Legal Note [Derogating From EU Asylum Law in the name of "emergencies": the legal limits under EU law](#) requested by the ELENA lawyers and used to support some of their cases even before publication, was welcomed by many legal practitioners and academics. Two legal notes on Cessation of international protection and on the use of remote methods in asylum procedures were commissioned from external experts and will be published in early 2021.

Legal training

ECRE continued training activities as planned in 2020, albeit online and using different training modalities due to restrictions caused by the pandemic. ECRE trained:

- » 27 legal practitioners in Austria on litigation before UN Treaty Bodies;
- » 101 legal practitioners from across Europe in the online ELENA Advanced Course. The course included keynote speeches by Judge Schembri Orland (ECtHR) on recent ECtHR jurisprudence in the field of asylum, and Advocate General Hogan (CJEU) concerning asylum-related CJEU jurisprudence. Other topics covered by the course included: gender-based asylum claims in Europe; fundamental rights implication of processing data in large-scale IT systems; statelessness and the link to asylum; the new Pact on Migration and Asylum; and a panel discussion on state of emergency and the rule of law. The course was positively evaluated by participants.
- » ECRE staff trained +80 legal practitioners from across Europe including Italy, Kazakhstan, Spain, Turkey in online events organised by or in collaboration with partner organisations.

The EDAL database

ECRE maintained the European Database of Asylum Law (EDAL), an online database containing +1,500 case law summaries from 22 European states and from the European Court of Human Rights and EU Court of Justice.

- » 105,078 users benefitted from EDAL in 2020 with the page views counting at 326,052.
- » 98 summaries were added to the database.
- » 26 summaries were updated with information on follow-up proceedings (2 cases from the European Court of Human Rights were updated following Grand Chamber rulings, 2 national cases were linked to preliminary rulings by the Court of Justice of the EU, 21 national cases were confirmed as final, and 1 national case was confirmed as repealed following appeal).
- » 22 volunteers from three universities were trained on preparation of EDAL summaries (QMUL, Cologne Law Clinic, and Gent Law Clinic).
- » The EDAL Twitter account gained 398 new followers.
- » ECRE launched a redesign and the IT transformation of the EDAL website and revision of its content.

Strategic Litigation

Beyond legal support, ECRE directly pursued interventions before EctHR, domestic courts and UN mechanisms, with five interventions before the ECtHR, CRC and Italian Council of State together with Litigation Task Force (LTF) partners. These included:

- » the first joint intervention before the EctHR with our members, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, in a case [S.B. and others v Croatia](#). The case concerns collective expulsion of migrants, including children, from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and excessive use of force. The [intervention](#) was led by ECRE.
- » intervention before the ECtHR's Grand Chamber case [Takhonov and Rakhmanov v Russia](#). The case

concerns the ECtHR's approach to diplomatic assurances, evidence assessment in extradition cases and challenges the Chamber approach to removals of ethnic Uzbeks to Kyrgyzstan. The [intervention](#) was co-drafted by ECRE and the ICJ.

In addition, ECRE also submitted an information note to the UN Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants relating to detention of children.

ACTIVITY 2: ADVOCACY

Overall objective 1: To influence EU policy and practice on protection of asylum seekers, refugees and displaced people through development of targeted recommendations and tailored advocacy

A functioning asylum system in Europe

Throughout 2020, ECRE reiterated its call for compliance rather than reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), with the exception of the Dublin Regulation ("Dublin"), where reform is necessary. This position was included in a [joint civil society statement](#) on the then upcoming Pact on Migration and Asylum in February 2020 and co-signed by many ECRE members. Beyond the membership, ECRE was able to get the compliance point accepted in the Green political group in the European Parliament (EP) who included it in their position on asylum and migration.

ECRE was commissioned by the EP Research Service to provide an [implementation report on the Dublin III Regulation](#). The report, which was presented in the Parliament's LIBE Committee in February 2020 provided ECRE the possibility to advance its proposal for rights-based compliance with Dublin III and to inform the EP's position on Dublin. The findings of the study are also referred to in the European Commission's proposed Regulation for Asylum and Migration Management published as part of the Pact. ECRE published its own [report on the implementation of Dublin in 2019 and during COVID-19 pandemic](#).

ECRE completed updates of the Asylum Information Database (AIDA) country reports. In 2020, AIDA country reports were referenced in 150 publications including by EASO, Council of Europe, UNHCR, national asylum authorities, academic researchers and think-tanks. AIDA outputs were cited in 60 media articles and relied on as authoritative evidence by courts in hundreds of cases at national and European level in at least 800 legal decisions, including in the recent ECtHR landmark judgment in the case of *N.D and N.T v Spain*.

A planned AIDA fact-finding mission to Belgium and the Netherlands was carried out remotely due to COVID-19 with a report to be published shortly. An online meeting with AIDA experts took place in November 2020 which was used to evaluate the updating process of the reports, discuss plans for the 2021 update and have a detailed exchange on various issues, including the impact of COVID-19 on national asylum practice. The AIDA website has transited to a new provider.

ECRE provided evidence in [debates relating to asylum statistics](#) which are consistently being misrepresented by senior EU officials and European politicians and saw its main points become standard elements of the debate. The final text of the reform of the Migration Statistics Regulation adopted in summer 2020 incorporated new provisions proposed by ECRE which was the only NGO engaged in the reform of the Regulation at EU level. Through a framework contract with EASO, ECRE provided input into the development of EASO training on vulnerabilities and communication for asylum practitioners and into EASO guidance on the internal protection alternative, subsequent applications, and cessation.

ECRE reacted to events arising in individual Member States, such as the [deterioration of the situation on the Greek/Turkish border](#) and the impact of COVID-19 related measures on asylum. On the latter, ECRE pulled together [information about COVID-19 impact on asylum in 28 countries](#) to support civil society, the European Commission, and the European Parliament in holding the Member States to account. The information sheet was updated five times throughout 2020 and shared with MEPs ahead of EP hearings about the impact of Covid-19 on asylum. Positive response from MEPs, ECRE members and officials in the EU and Council of Europe were received. In addition, the information sheet helped civil society to keep up-to-date with changes in the context, for example, the introduction of online registration of asylum claims in Belgium.

In response to the publication of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, ECRE and UNHCR organised

[a roundtable](#) to discuss the proposals in September 2020, offering the first opportunity for exchange between policy-makers and civil society about the Pact in Brussels. ECRE developed a [joint NGO statement](#) in consultation with members and wider civil society which was co-signed by 90 organisations and is translated into twelve languages, with related advocacy and distribution plans in ten EU Member States.

ECRE prepared detailed "Comments" papers and accompanying succinct policy notes on two of the legislative proposals in 2020. A special edition of the Weekly Bulletin covered these publications. ECRE was invited to discuss the Pact proposals in roundtables organised by two political groups and by leading think tanks in Brussels. A series of advocacy meetings with Members of the European Parliament and Member States started in the end of the year and will continue throughout 2021.

European external policies advance rights of displaced people and reduce forced displacement

ECRE continued its criticism of instrumentalisation of EU development assistance and other external policies to force third countries to cooperate with the EU on migration control objectives. Through [publication of analysis](#) and advocacy towards MEPs, including a joint letter which ECRE initiated in cooperation with many ECRE members, development NGOs and Concord, the European Parliament's rejection of migration control conditionality was maintained for a long period of the negotiations. Bilateral exchanges with the German Permanent Representation (leading negotiations on the Council side) also took place.

ECRE continued its cooperation with civil society from non-EU countries, with a focus on Africa due to the importance of EU-Africa relations in 2020 (with publication of the EU's proposed strategy with Africa, negotiations of the post-Cotonou framework, and planned EU-AU Summit (postponed to 2021 due to COVID-19)). ECRE commissioned nine working papers from African experts who analysed the impact of EU migration policy on their countries and made recommendations for future relations, covering the EU and Morocco, Senegal, Niger, Kenya, Ethiopia, The Gambia and EU-AU relations more broadly. The [Special Weekly Bulletin edition](#) in which the papers were published in February 2020 included a short summary of each working paper and resulted in the highest ever opening rate for the Weekly Bulletin. Authors and other African civil society experts were to travel to Brussels in March to discuss their analysis with EU institution officials at a policy roundtable, with key MEPs from across four different political groups in a meeting hosted by a German Renew Europe MEP and during an exchange with Member State representatives from two different Council Working groups dealing with Africa. Interest in and registration for the meetings was high but these events were cancelled due to COVID-19.

On safe and regular pathways, ECRE developed considerations on private sponsorship schemes and developed a [joint statement](#) on resettlement with members to call to quickly and urgently revive resettlement efforts following the hiatus caused by COVID-19. ECRE also focused on EU funding for resettlement, supported by evidence published in early 2020 in the [ECRE UNHCR Follow The Money Report](#) on the topic and [specific recommendations on EU funding to incentivise relocation and resettlement rather than returns.](#)

Countering the disproportionate focus on return

ECRE continued its work on the Return Directive, both by influencing the EP report on the implementation of the Return Directive and the EP's position on the proposed Recast Return Directive. ECRE has developed close and cooperative working relations with MEPs from four political groups working on the two files, including the rapporteur and some of ECRE's recommendations were accepted.

On the EP's Implementation Report on the Return Directive, some positive elements which ECRE called for were taken on board, such as the acknowledgment that the return rate is not the only factor for judging effectiveness; support to voluntary returns; reiteration of the position of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that children should never be detained for immigration purpose; and encouragement of States to make use of regularisation. The process of deciding the EP's position on the recast Return Directive is ongoing. In addition, ECRE provided [analysis and recommendations on return during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) which led to exchanges with representatives of three Member States.

Returns to Afghanistan continued to be a focus, in response to the re-negotiation of the Joint Way Forward on Migration, an agreement between the EU and Afghanistan. To support a broad range of actors, including civil society in Afghanistan, ECRE translated its [Policy Note on Returns to Afghanistan into Persian](#). It developed a concerted advocacy push on the re-negotiation by proposing a hearing of EP's LIBE and DROI Committee in September and at which ECRE spoke. In addition, [ECRE co-organised an exchange between two key MEPs](#) working on returns to Afghanistan and civil society, primarily Afghan-led groups in

Europe and Afghanistan. The advocacy efforts were supported by a [joint statement](#) that ECRE produced and which was co-signed by +40 organisations and also covered by the media. The statement was translated into Persian, Dutch, German, Swedish and Greek, and ECRE supported advocacy activities on return to Afghanistan taken forward by Afghan-led organisations in target Member States through small grants.

Preventing measures to restrict asylum, use of non-entrée policies and human rights violations at EU borders

ECRE convened a discussion on Croatia in February 2020 to further promote its recommendations on Croatia, on funding for border management, and on Schengen. The priority was to bring S&D (political group) MEPs and European Commission officials dealing with the issue (DG HOME, DG JUST and DG NEAR) around the table to expand the group of allies and contacts, which succeeded. ECRE's analysis and recommendations are repeatedly quoted in LIBE discussions on border violence and Schengen. These include recommending a new assessment of Croatia's readiness to join Schengen; exchanges with independent civil society monitoring violence at borders; and human rights conditionality and monitoring when EU funding supports border management. In cooperation with ICMPD and the European University Institute, ECRE prepared an [assessment report on the Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Mechanism](#) for the European Parliament which was published in November 2020. The involvement in the study has greatly supported understanding of the untransparent evaluation process. Due to the work of ECRE and others in highlighting the shortcomings of the mechanism, the European Commission has included respect for fundamental rights as an issue to address in reform in 2021.

ECRE [warned](#) about the implications of including a mandatory border procedure in the New Pact throughout 2020, reiterating previous analysis and setting out recommendations including in exchanges with three different political groups in the EP, exchanges with Member State representatives, and in meetings with Commissioner Johannsson. In addition, ECRE used the AIDA updates to collect evidence on the use of border procedures by Member States. This compilation of analysis was one of the reasons why the European Parliament asked ECRE to prepare a [study on the implementation of Article 43 of the recast Asylum Procedures Directive](#) on border procedures with case studies on seven Member States (FR, DE, IT, ES, PT, EL, HU). The findings of the study were discussed with key Members of the EP.

ECRE supported joint civil society advocacy on the proposal for an independent border monitoring mechanism which is part of the Pact. As one of the few positive elements of the proposed Pact, it was important to ensure that civil society's recommendations on strengthening the monitoring mechanism are included in the discussion early on. Building on exchange and discussion among NGOs, ECRE drafted a short statement summarising what needs to change which was co-signed by the leading NGOs working on this issue and [published in November](#). This is the first step in advocacy to ensure that the mechanism is not a fig leaf behind which violations at the border continue. Within a week of its publication, the recommendations put forward were endorsed by a shadow rapporteur on the respective regulation, the Council of Europe, OHCHR, the European Ombudsperson, and the Fundamental Rights Agency.

Inclusion through rights, respect and regularization

ECRE continued its work on increasing funding for inclusion in the next EU budget as part of its joint project with PICUM. Dedicated discussions on the MFF negotiations and national funding priorities took place in roundtable meetings co-organised by ECRE in France and Greece in February 2020. In addition, ECRE and PICUM [consolidated their position on the partnership principle](#) in EU funding arrangements. Upon agreement between the Council of the overall amount of the EU budget and the COVID-19 recovery package, ECRE and PICUM [rapidly presented an analysis](#) of its impact on inclusion and proposed recommendations to the EP, European Commission and Member States.

ECRE also engaged on the review of the EU Action Plan on integration of third country nationals. It convened an exchange between European Commission officials and refugee- and migrant-led organisations in September to enable them to provide input to the consultation of the revised Action Plan. The meeting brought together over 30 participants, the majority were refugee advocates from 18 European countries. ECRE prepared input to the consultation and a [detailed policy paper](#) with analysis, best practice and recommendations for the Action Plan, to which ECRE members contributed.

Overall objective 2: To strengthen ECRE’s advocacy team and support influential and effective advocacy

ECRE maintained and in some cases increased its exchange with ECRE members throughout 2020. This year, the CEAS, inclusion and external affairs Working Groups each met three times and there have been three meetings of the Brussels-based ECRE members where policy developments and organisational updates were discussed. In addition, members were involved in shaping ECRE’s analysis and position on the Pact, with two joint statements prepared after consultation with members. In addition, various publications were sent to members for input, including the Comments on the Pact legislative proposals. Over 70 email updates were sent to the three Working Groups, in addition to five Advocacy Briefings and one “lines to take” document.

ECRE quickly mobilised support for its members in response to COVID-19, where there was a risk that governments clamped down on the right to asylum. For instance, upon request from Slovenian member PIC, ECRE wrote a letter to the Slovenian Minister of the Interior, which contributed to the successful advocacy carried out by PIC against plans to expand the role of the military at the border and reduce funding for organisations supporting asylum seekers.

ECRE regularly communicates with 30+ refugee advocates. In 2020, six updates were sent to inform them about policy developments and involve them in ECRE’s work. Refugee-led organisations played a leading role in ECRE’s work on returns to Afghanistan and the review of the Action Plan on Inclusion and Integration specifically. Both for the meetings that ECRE had planned and which could not take place due to COVID-19, as well as the meetings which did take place, refugee advocates played a key role as expert speakers.

Overview of advocacy activities and outputs in 2020

Policy Notes - short documents with key points	8
Policy Papers	1
ECRE Comments - detailed legal analysis of legislative proposals	2
Studies commissioned by the European Parliament from ECRE	3
Studies prepared by ECRE and UNHCR	1
Working papers commissioned by ECRE	9
Joint NGO statements (drafted and organised by ECRE)	4
Advocacy Briefings and Lines to Take for ECRE members	6
Working group and Brussels-based members meetings	12
Policy roundtables (online and offline, bringing together CS and policy-makers)	6
Bilateral meetings with EU policy-makers (EP, EC, EEAS, MS) including online meetings due to COVID-19	Over 110

ACTIVITY 3: COMMUNICATIONS

The ECRE Communication Strategy has been revised for the period 2020-22 along with the portfolio of strategic documents providing guidelines, templates and procedures. The following summary is based on the objectives outlined in the revised communications strategy, the quarterly reports on communications provided to the ECRE Board, and on statistics compared to the baseline presented to the Board in January 2017.

Objective 1: Increase the understanding and support of refugee rights in the segment of young progressive Europeans engaged in the public debate through traditional media and active on social media.

Presswork: in 2020 as for past years, ECRE gave +100 interviews to major media outlets, at the international, European and national level including the BBC, CNN, Euronews, the New York Times, NBC, Le Monde, Deutsche Welle, El Pais and Al-Jazeera. The main topics in 2020 were the COVID-19 impact on European asylum systems; the situation in Greece and at the border with Turkey; and the European Pact on Migration and Asylum launched on 23 September by the European Commission.

Social media/newsletters: Social media presence and outreach through our main newsletters continue to increase. A very efficient weekly production cycle was established ensuring synergy and efficient workflows: first, compiling media references for ECRE Press Review (60+ media sources), and then, based on the Review, feeding social media during the week and drafting a Weekly Bulletin topic list; conducting the Weekly Bulletin editorial meeting with representatives of all ECRE teams to select topics for in-depth articles on national and European developments in relation to asylum and migration; writing/editing the Bulletin; and finally covering social media platforms over the weekend with the articles featured directly in the Bulletin.

Campaigning: ECRE conducted its first major joint campaign under the hashtag [#YourVoteOurFuture](#) in 2018/2019 mobilising progressive voters for the European Parliament elections based on statements from refugee advocates and refugee-led organisations. The campaign was joined by 26 organisations (mostly ECRE members) and reached 1 million Europeans. Building on this experience and the network infrastructure established (including the ECRE Media Officers Network (EMON), ECRE launched an even more ambitious joint campaign in 2020 under the tagline: Human Rights Compliance - [#HardlyRocketScience](#). The campaign aims to ensure public support in reminding politicians to uphold human rights during negotiations on the European Pact on Migration and Asylum. The campaign has been joined by +60 organisations and artists and performers (new and old Europeans alike) from 20 Member States. While the campaign is ongoing, initial evaluation suggests it will reach at least 1 million Europeans.

Further, two interlinked campaigns of the ELENA legal network managed by ECRE, are under preparation celebrating the 35-year anniversary of the network. 10 videos have been produced for distribution via social media under the hashtag RightsR4All, a landing site is under development and material is being selected for further video production for a second phase of the campaign.

New formats and platforms: The new forms of communication of ECRE's work have continued to attract support: Policy Notes are appreciated by ECRE members and Editorials are often cited by journalists when they ask for interviews. Further, the use of music (original soundtracks), dance, beats and lyrics and production of high quality original video content has boosted ECRE's capacity to reach wider audiences during campaigning. Further, the communication team has included the ECRE LinkedIn account in the portfolio of platforms and put it to use for campaigning initiatives.

Outreach social media, digital newsletters, press:

- » Daily Press Review: increase in subscribers to 3.145 (1/1/2017 baseline: 390) opening rate 33%
- » Weekly Bulletin: Increase in subscribers to 13,332 (1/1/2017 baseline: 11,500); opening rate 27%
- » Twitter: Increase of followers to 23,745 (1/1/2017 baseline: 12,400)
- » Facebook: Increase of subscribers to 27.829 (1/1/2017 baseline: 19,800)
- » Press: roughly 100 interviews and background talks annually

Objective 2: Contribute to the overall efficiency of ECRE and the organisation's ability to achieve its strategic aims.

New structure and support set up: ECRE saw an increase of cyberattacks and identified some general vulnerabilities in its IT and technical support set up that were addressed through a full revision of support functions. To ensure qualified and sustainable backup on hardware maintenance, security, design and web development we have outsourced parts of the Communication portfolio and developed the needed internal procedures. The process was concluded and new practices fully implemented in the first quarter of 2020.

Websites: As reflected in the ECRE Communication Strategy 2020-22, the ongoing efforts to ensure an efficient and coherent promotion of and coordination between ECRE and its sub-brands continue. Accordingly, the websites of the Asylum Information Database (AIDA) and the European Database of Asylum Law (EDAL) are under revision. Both will be transferred to the regular Wordpress back-end system and easier to navigate for visitors. The new AIDA website should be ready for launch in the first quarter of 2021 and a contract has been concluded for the EDAL website, that will be completed in 2021.

The ECRE **publication page** has been redesigned to include an archive as well as dedicated pages for the standard formats for a better overview of the substantial number of organisational outlets. A new system for backing up publications was also established.

Guidelines: We continue to develop our strategic guidelines and a formal 7-step guide was developed and implemented for the distribution and back-up of all ECRE publications. It includes relevant website(s) locations, filing system, social media, and newsletters.

EQUIPMENT: A quality camera (video and stills) has been purchased to be used for online/live events, as well as ECRE campaigns and communication. New laptops and software have replaced outdated and worn-out desktops and software.

Organisational Development

Underlying objective:

To ensure that ECRE:

1. performs effectively, meeting objectives in each of the four areas of its activity
2. is efficient and provides value for money, including compared to other organisations
3. applies its strategic priorities in all areas of its work.

Strategic Priority 1 To promote visions of an inclusive Europe where people seeking protection are welcome and their rights protected, including proposing legal and policy alternatives.

ECRE presented alternatives in all its publications and presentations, rather than simply criticising the situation or proposals. Notably, on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, ECRE developed and promoted its alternative vision and gathered support from its members and other NGOs. Its joint advocacy and communications work stressed the fairness to people as well as the greater efficiency of its alternative approaches.

Strategic Priority 2 To mobilise ECRE as an alliance to advocate collectively for change.

Despite shifting work online, ECRE continued to expand member involvement in its work. It organised 12 meetings for members to discuss joint advocacy work; prepared 6 joint statements that members and other NGOs signed up to; 5 Board meetings and the ECRE General Assembly took place to get member input and decisions; members joined the #HardlyRocketScience campaign, and were frequently contacted for communications purposes. The ELENA network which includes members and independent asylum lawyers had training events and a coordination meeting online.

Strategic Priority 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.

ECRE strove to include people with a refugee background and refugee-led organisations in all areas of its work, as staff members, Board members, members of the alliance, and as key speakers in events. Efforts will increase in 2021 when recruitment becomes possible again (the planned recruitment of a staff member with a refugee background was delayed due to COVID-19). ECRE provided advocacy support and small grants to refugee-led organisations, in particular in relation to work on inclusion and on Afghanistan.

Strategic Partnerships

1. Renew UNHCR Strategic Partnership every year for 2020 – 2022.

ECRE continued to work with UNHCR within the Strategic Partnership between the two in 2020, despite the challenges posed by COVID. Only one in-person event took place, a policy roundtable on the EU Pact in September 2020. Other activities were transferred online or adapted to be delivered in different forms due to COVID.

The continuation of the Partnership for 2021 was confirmed and a contract signed at the end of 2020. In addition, ECRE began new cooperation with UNHCR HQ in Geneva which has a bolstered Europe department following restructuring.

2. Develop strategic partnerships with other agencies and institutions, including EASO and FRA.

ECRE signed a four-year Framework Contract with EASO which covers review of EASO products, including training modules and analysis. ECRE increased contacts with FRA, with three meetings taking place between staff and FRA representatives and FRA invited to lead a session at the ELENA Advanced Training Course for lawyers.

Finances and fundraising

1. Maintain a positive asset balance.
2. Establish a reserve fund of EUR 150,000 by 2022.

ECRE ended 2020 with a positive asset balance of EUR 474,000 (to be confirmed by auditors), this figure constitutes its full available reserves and the best position it has been in since 2009. As there is still a funding shortfall for 2021, ECRE's Board agreed that EUR 100,000 can be used in 2021; ECRE continues to fundraise in any case. ECRE will thus maintain its reserves. The situation shows continued progress since end 2017 when ECRE entered the black, having previously been technically insolvent since 2011.

3. Approve budgets with no more than a 20% shortfall.

The budget for 2021 was approved with a 40% shortfall in May 2020. In fact, the target of 20% is now unrealistic as ECRE's budget has to be approved before June due to a change in Belgian law on not-for-profit organisations (rather than in October which was previously the case). Thus, the objective has been adapted by the ECRE Board, to aim for a maximum 20% in September.

4. Grants from four core donors.
5. Bring in revenue of at least EUR 1.6 million/year.

ECRE continues to receive funds from four core donors and in 2020 revenue was EUR 1.52 million.

ECRE is very grateful to all its donors. For core support: Adessium Foundation, JRCT, Oak Foundation and Sigrid Rausing Trust (and ECRE members' fees). For project support: the European Union (AMIF and Erasmus+), UNHCR, Stichting Porticus, EPIM, the Dutch Council for Refugees. For service contracts: the European Parliament and EASO. Pro bono legal assistance is provided by DLA Piper, Mayer Brown, BPP University, Queen Mary University of London, University of Torino, University of Köln, University of Gent.

Organisational structure

1. Maintain a clear organisational structure capable of being expressed in an organigram with teams and line management.

ECRE employs 12.2 Full-Time Equivalents and 3 or 4 assistants (paid interns under the Belgian government's "Immersion Professionnelle" scheme). The staff are organised into three teams, one for each of the three activities, with all staff allocated a line manager. In addition, there is a Director, Head of Finance and Administration, and a project officer who provide organisational support (included in the 12.2 FTE). The structure appears in an organigram which is always available on the ECRE website.

Membership

1. Retain at least 100 members losing no more than 2 members per year.
2. Confirm that a majority of members demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with ECRE's work as per membership surveys or other consultation.

ECRE ended 2020 with 107 members in 40 European countries, with 3 members joining and 1 member leaving (due to closing down) during the year. A membership survey was planned for 2020 but had to be postponed due to the pressures of COVID; it will be carried out at a later stage.

Partnership

1. Work in cooperation other networks working on asylum and migration issues, including PICUM and refugee-led networks.
2. Cooperate with European think-tanks working on asylum and migration with at least 4 invitations to present at think-tank events per year.
3. Cooperate with academic networks, including participation in one research project per year and invitations to at least 2 academic conference per year.

ECRE continues its cooperation with PICUM. It also works with ICVA on a new consultation series between UNHCR and civil society. ECRE works with think-tanks and was invited to speak at 5 think-tank events in 2020. ECRE is involved in various academic networks, with the ECRE Director on the advisory boards of two H2020 projects and ECRE participated in the RESOMA project which concluded in 2020. ECRE staff received ten invitations to speak at major academic conferences.

Board

1. Maintain diversity of the Board to reflect ECRE's membership, taking into account geographic diversity, gender, ethnicity, refugee background, sexuality, and any other factor that may be relevant.
2. At least 3 Board members should be female.
3. Ensure the Board plays a consistently active role in ECRE's governance as per ECRE's statutes, and effectively represents the interests of membership in its decision-making.

The Board includes members with a refugee background and representing sexual and ethnic minorities. It includes representatives of all regions of Europe and 4 of 7 Board members are female, the first time in ECRE's history that there is a female majority on the Board.

The Board had 5 meetings in 2020 (all took place online due to the health emergency). Separately, the ECRE Director and Chair of the Board met 6 times to oversee ECRE's plans, activities and management. There were 4 meetings of the Finance Committee (composed of ECRE Treasurer, a Board member, the ECRE Director and ECRE Head of Finance and Administration), in order to provide additional scrutiny of ECRE's finances.