



**International
Strategy
Update
2026–2030**

Together in solidarity, strengthening of refugee protection in Europe

Contents



1. Introduction



Our commitment is driven by human rights, human dignity and a shared responsibility for the protection of refugees in Europe. The EU borders are our borders. We work together, in solidarity with refugee organisations across Europe, to honour this commitment. The goal: to give asylum seekers and refugees a new future. Yet this very foundation is now under pressure. The dismantling of protection and reception, ongoing violence at Europe's internal and external borders and the shifting of responsibilities to countries outside the EU are not merely trends described in reports; these are developments that hide unprecedented human suffering.

"The Dutch Council for Refugees was the only organisation that truly understood our difficult position." – Öykü Tümer, Refugee Rights Türkiye

At the same time, we and other refugee organisations at Europe's (external) borders face major challenges. Budget cuts and growing pressure on civil society organisations throughout Europe are reducing our capacity to stand up independently and effectively for refugees. The upcoming reorganisation of the Dutch Council for Refugees forces us to make sharper choices and set priorities. It is a reality that calls for cooperation and renewed focus.

European and international cooperation and solidarity are more important than ever, and now is the time when we must renew our international strategy. To navigate the headwinds, we must make choices and strengthen the resilience of our collective movement, ourselves included. That is why the Dutch Council for Refugees has chosen to work with other European refugee organisations to build a strong and resilient movement that will ensure our voices continue to be heard in Brussels, by national governments and by policymakers throughout the EU.

"Travelling to partners across Europe is crucial. You only gain a true understanding and motivation once you have seen situations for yourself."

– Frank Candel, Chair of the Board, Dutch Council for Refugees

Our goal remains unchanged: to ensure that refugees maintain access to legal protection and reception in the Netherlands and across Europe. In line with our core value "Collaboration", we can only achieve this goal through solidarity and international cooperation

2. New reality: threats and opportunities



Never have so many people been displaced around the world. At the same time, the political climate in Europe is becoming increasingly hostile towards refugees and civil society organisations. Despite this reality, we are committed to the protection, reception and integration of refugees in the Netherlands and across Europe.

Internationally, we see the following trends that pose a threat to our mission:

➤ The international protection regime is under pressure

Across Europe, protection and reception are increasingly portrayed as a burden rather than a responsibility. The entry into force of the European Asylum and Migration Pact in 2026 threatens to erode the rights of refugees further. This is the result of increasing pressure at the EU's external borders, more detention, the "buying off" of solidarity and inadequate basic reception conditions for people travelling onwards to their country of destination. At Europe's external border (which is also our border), we see continuing violence, illegal pushbacks and denial of access to asylum. In addition, Europe's governments (including the Dutch government), are increasingly shifting their responsibilities onto countries outside the EU. They strike migration deals to keep people outside the EU, externalise asylum procedures and develop plans for "return hubs". These actions place unprecedented pressure on the international protection space and are accompanied by human rights violations resulting from the conditions in the countries with which such agreements are made.

➤ International courts and legal assistance are being undermined

Across Europe, the judiciary is under pressure that further jeopardises the protection of refugees. Increasingly, national governments and politicians question or openly criticise European courts and supervisory international bodies. This undermines their independence and authority. Several countries are criminalising or at least strongly discouraging the work of legal aid providers. In addition, lawyers are quitting their work through NGOs due to excessive workloads and limited resources, leaving refugees with too little access to legal assistance and effective representation. These developments pose a serious threat to the legal system as a safeguard for human rights.

➤ Civil society organisations are under threat

Across Europe, including the Netherlands, civil society organisations face increasing pressure. Those that are committed to the legal protection and reception of refugees are confronted with the growing criminalisation of humanitarian assistance. At the same time, there is less funding available, so these organisations are forced to carry out their work with ever fewer resources and reduced capacity. This also affects refugees' access to legal assistance and social support, with direct consequences for their protection throughout the EU. In addition, civil society organisations are struggling against a hostile narrative that primarily portrays refugees and migration as a threat. The space for these organisations is continuously being questioned or actively undermined.

➤ Refugees are instrumentalised and solidarity is being undermined

In public and political debates across Europe, refugees are increasingly being used as scapegoats for broader social problems such as housing shortages, security concerns and economic insecurity. This instrumentalisation undermines solidarity and increases polarisation. It reduces refugees to numbers or policy objects, ignoring their personal stories and rights. The hostile narrative that results, in which migration is portrayed as a threat, has direct consequences for policy, public support and even the safety of aid workers and organisations.

These negative trends have a major impact on our daily work. At the same time, there are also bright spots and international opportunities. These offer hope for change and provide starting points for making choices regarding our strategic priorities:

➤ **European asylum and migration policy as an opportunity**

While it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure political majorities for the protection of refugees at the national level, there are still opportunities for refugee organisations at the European and local levels. Many of the decisions that directly affect the protection and reception of refugees are made in Brussels. The European Asylum and Migration Pact, which enters into force in mid-2026, presents not only threats but also opportunities to hold national governments accountable. In practice, we see opportunities to engage with Dutch politicians and policymakers in Brussels about how our country can contribute to more humane protection and reception in Europe. Cooperation with and active involvement in our umbrella organisation, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), form an essential part of this effort.

➤ **An independent judiciary as a counterbalance**

In Europe, the judiciary plays a crucial role in protecting refugees and ensuring that governments fulfil their human rights obligations. Despite increasing pressure on the judiciary, judges and courts repeatedly prove that they are an essential counterbalance to policies that restrict or ignore the rights of refugees. Various national and European courts have overturned or suspended government decisions when these were found to conflict with international treaties or European law. For example, this has occurred in cases concerning pushbacks at external borders or access to asylum procedures.

➤ **Financial opportunities**

Thanks to our strong international network with other refugee organisations, EU funders and relevant international stakeholders, the Dutch Council for Refugees has a solid foundation for accessing international funding programmes. This network significantly increases the chances that our grant applications will be successful and makes it possible for us to make optimal use of strategic partnerships within consortia. Our network also provides access to new knowledge, best practices and innovative approaches, enabling us to strengthen and scale up our ongoing programmes, including our services. In this way, we sustainably increase our impact on refugees and migrants in the Netherlands and Europe.

➤ **Networks and partnerships for solidarity**

Migration and asylum are cross-border issues. Refugees who arrive in the Netherlands have often endured difficult journeys marked by violence, hardship and trauma, both in their countries of origin and during their journeys through Europe. We take these experiences into account in our services and support. For example, up-to-date information on reception conditions and pushbacks is indispensable to legal assistance in Dublin cases, and practical country information at the case level is important to family reunification procedures. This knowledge improves our services.

To influence European policy effectively, we must know what is happening at Europe's external borders. While we are present in asylum reception centres and municipalities in the Netherlands, our partners fulfil this monitoring role at Europe's borders. Cooperation with organisations such as the Centre for Peace Studies in Croatia and the Greek Council for Refugees gives us access to reliable information and enables us to speak directly with refugees. This knowledge is essential to our discussions with politicians, policymakers and the media. We exchange best practices, identify trends at an early stage and develop joint projects, campaigns and policy proposals. In this way, we build communities of practice around strategic litigation, advocacy, communication, trauma-informed work and innovative protection initiatives. This enables us to further improve and develop our services.

“Our partnership with the Dutch Council for Refugees is essential to our work. Their support helps us strengthen our capacity to monitor borders, pursue strategic litigation and contribute to policy change. As pressure on our organisation continues to increase, ongoing cooperation is not only valuable, but more urgent than ever.” – Sara Kekuš, Centre for Peace Studies, Croatia

European networks such as the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and the European Legal Network on Asylum (ELENA) play a connecting role in this effort. They are crucial to advocacy in Brussels, information exchange and the alignment of legal and practical realities across the EU. Networks and partnerships increase the impact of individual organisations and strengthen the collective voice, resilience and cohesion of the movement for refugee protection throughout Europe.

3. Future visions and ambitions: what do we want to achieve?



We are committed to change that improves protection for asylum seekers and refugees while also contributing to Dutch and European society. We strive to build a world in which no one is excluded and everyone can participate.

"I want to learn how organisations in other countries deal with our work."

— Edwin Leenhouts, Director of Services, Dutch Council for Refugees

International cooperation is central to how we achieve our ambitions. Through projects, fundraising, communication and knowledge exchange, we strengthen our influence, gather signals from partners and refugees, and contribute to a resilient civil society. Our approach is grounded in working in coordination and cooperation with others, based on a shared responsibility for refugee protection in Europe – international solidarity in practice. Building and maintaining our network through capacity-strengthening projects is crucial to our work.

In the coming years, we will strengthen and anchor our role as advocate and guide. We will deploy our expertise in a focused manner and make clear choices in a context of limited resources. As a Dutch NGO with European and international responsibility, we draw on our 45 years of experience and cooperation with partners in and around Europe, including western Europe and the Caribbean part of the Kingdom. We will also continue contributing to joint efforts as part of the ECRE network. This foundation informs our work towards three future visions with concrete ambitions that together form our theory of change.

The importance of collaboration

Working with partner organisations at Europe's borders gives us up-to-date knowledge and on-the-ground intelligence about asylum access, border procedures and human rights violations. This knowledge strengthens our legal protection and advocacy work in the Netherlands and across Europe. It also improves the services we provide to refugees in the Netherlands, such as in Dublin cases and for people who have experienced violence or trauma during their journey. Furthermore, it enables us to partner with European consortia in seeking European funds for national activities, which helps to reinforce our position.

At the same time, strengthening these partner organisations is essential to maintaining this early-warning function. When organisations at Europe's external borders collapse under pressure, crucial sources of information are lost. By investing in their capacity, we not only strengthen protection at the borders, but also safeguard our own role as a credible advocate and guide within a shared European movement.

Our theory of change consists of three future visions with concrete ambitions.

1. EU and national governments that welcome and protect refugees.

Future vision:

We envision an EU in which member states receive and protect refugees in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international treaties. This would be a Europe that acts in solidarity, takes responsibility and strengthens humane reception systems instead of dismantling them.

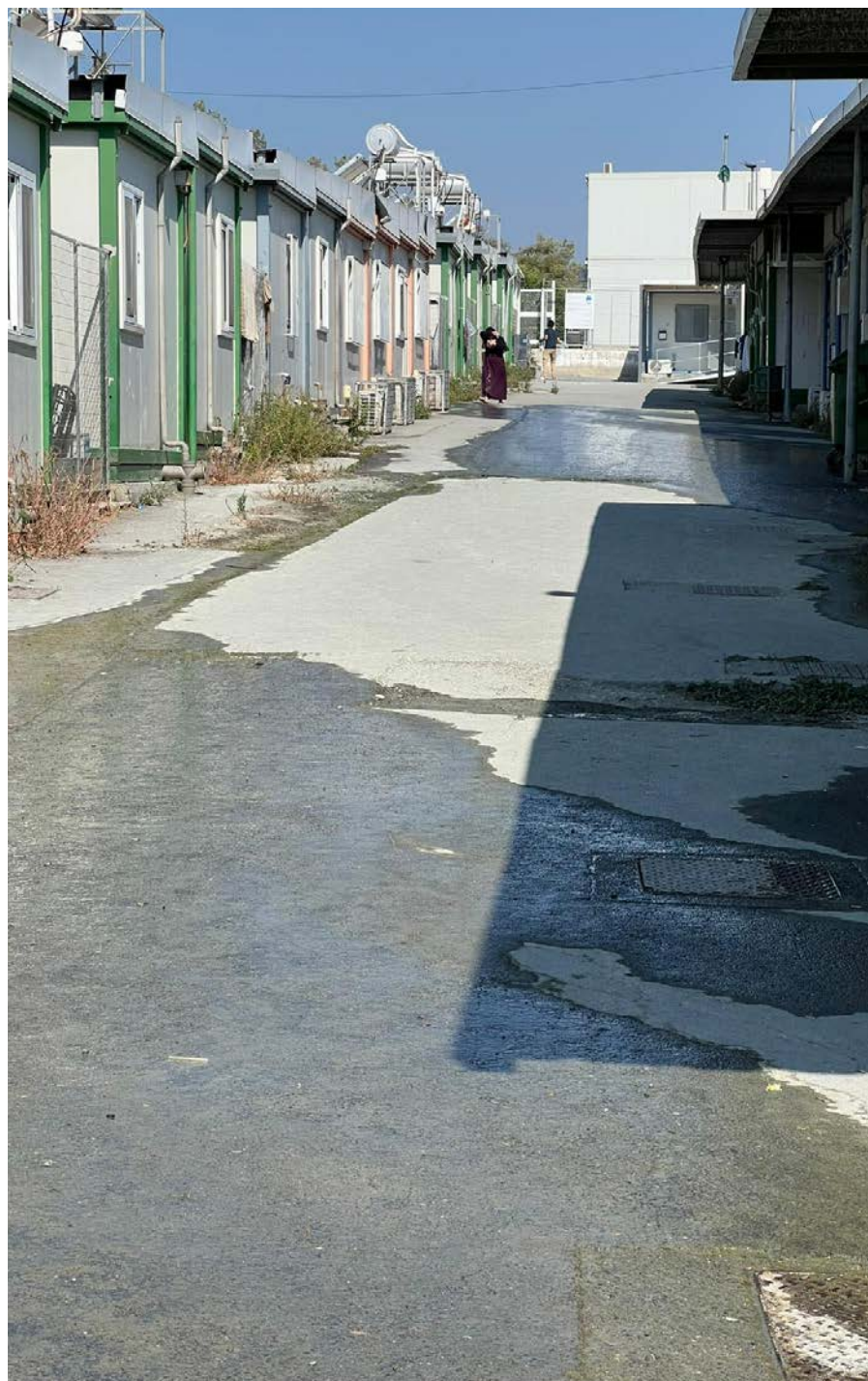
- **Space for civil society:** We are determined to protect essential services and advocacy from criminalisation, budget cuts and political pressure. We therefore actively commit ourselves to preserving and strengthening civil society in Europe, and refugee organisations in particular. We will continue to invest in international solidarity and cooperation, so these organisations remain resilient and can continue to make their voices heard. International cooperation and knowledge exchange through communities of practice and roundtables are crucial to this effort.
- **Safe routes and access to asylum:** We are committed to stopping pushbacks, violence and detention at Europe's borders. We also promote safe routes that ensure access to asylum is a right and not a matter of luck or risk.
- **A solidarity-based and humane European asylum policy:** Everyone deserves safe access to an asylum procedure, guaranteed fundamental rights such as family reunification and legal assistance, and reception facilities that are humane and safe. The European Asylum and Migration Pact must not be used to shift responsibilities. Instead, it must contribute to fair, shared and sustainable protection and reception throughout Europe.

- **Fair migration partnerships with third countries:** We want fair migration partnerships with third countries based on human rights, shared responsibility and sustainable solutions. This means rejecting the externalisation of asylum procedures in favour of investments in global protection and prospects for refugees.
- **Effective access to asylum procedures and sustainable protection:** We want refugees to have opportunities to rebuild their lives. After all, international protection is more than temporary shelter and food in third countries; it is a solid foundation for migration cooperation.
- **A protected Refugee Convention:** The Refugee Convention must be protected because it forms the core of global solidarity and shared responsibility. We also consider it essential that Europe and the Netherlands do not become structurally complicit in human rights violations at the EU's external borders or in countries party to migration deals.

What we are going to do differently:

- Strengthen our strategic focus on themes such as pushbacks, border detention and migration partnerships.
- Build alliances and organise roundtables with NGOs outside the Netherlands, enabling us to achieve maximum impact with relatively limited resources.
- Explicitly focus our international communication on stakeholders, fundraising and showcasing the impact of partners, projects and refugees' stories.





2. A judiciary that safeguards fair asylum and migration policy

Future vision:

We envision a Europe in which the judiciary acts independently and decisively to protect refugees and hold governments accountable. The right to asylum remains a fundamental human right, and human rights form the foundation of policy and implementation.

Ambitions:

➤ **Defending the right to asylum:** We want the right to asylum – a fundamental human right enshrined in international treaties and European legislation – to be upheld and respected. Asylum procedures must provide safeguards appropriate to this fundamental right. Together with our partners, we will hold governments accountable when they undermine these principles and, where necessary, challenge them in court. We oppose the trend towards building a “Fortress Europe” and shifting European responsibility for the relatively limited number of refugees who seek protection in Europe. We cannot overstate the importance of this in our discussions with critics and people who are concerned about migration. If Europe looks away and shifts responsibility elsewhere, the entire global protection system will collapse, creating a domino effect in which more and more countries will close their borders. Why would other countries continue to host refugees if prosperous Europe closes its doors? This approach is destructive and will ultimately increase the number of refugees who seek safety around the world, including in Europe. It also will have serious consequences for stability in conflict regions.

➤ Addressing inadequate reception conditions:

Governments that fail to meet minimum reception standards in Europe must be held accountable. We advocate for humane accommodation, adequate food, healthcare, education and psychosocial support, paying particular attention to vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women and survivors of violence. Detention should only be used as a measure of last resort (ultimum remedium).

➤ Holding border police and public authorities

accountable: We want to prevent refugees from being returned to countries where they risk persecution, violence or serious human rights violations. Asylum procedures must comply with the standards enshrined in international and European legislation and international treaties.

Together with our partners at the borders, we hold those responsible for such violations to account through the courts. Strategic litigation is a powerful tool for ensuring the structural protection of refugees' rights.

What we are going to do differently:

- Make even more strategic use of litigation as a tool for structural protection.
- Strengthen the way we combine expertise and signals from partners at the borders and use them to increase legal and policy impact.

3.A strong civil society capable of standing up for refugees

Future vision:

We envision a strong, resilient and inclusive civil society in Europe, one that remains capable of protecting and supporting refugees, even when it is threatened by political pressure and shrinking resources.

Ambitions:

➤ Financial resources and capacity strengthening:

We want to simultaneously build resilient refugee organisations in Europe and explicitly strengthen our own organisation and services. This requires sufficient capacity and financial resources. Especially at a time of declining support from national governments, we want to take advantage of fundraising opportunities in the EU and beyond, in cooperation with our international partners.

➤ Resilient organisations:

We strive to maintain resilient organisations (including our own) that are prepared to meet challenges such as digitalisation, providing services with fewer resources, and declining public support for refugees. This requires continuous adaptation, innovation and development on strategic issues. If we want to continue fulfilling our mission, we must strengthen resilience by learning from each other's experiences, especially in countries where the situation has been under pressure for much longer.

➤ Pan-European coalitions that join forces and innovate:

We want to strengthen solidarity between refugee organisations. By working together in coalitions and communities of practice, we focus on strategic innovation, capacity strengthening and practical knowledge exchange in line with our organisation's needs and vision for the future. Working in coalitions also increases our political influence. Together, we are stronger in Europe. Joint communication plays a connecting role by enabling the development of a shared narrative that centres rights, humanity and solidarity.

➤ Strengthening refugee-led and grassroots organisations:

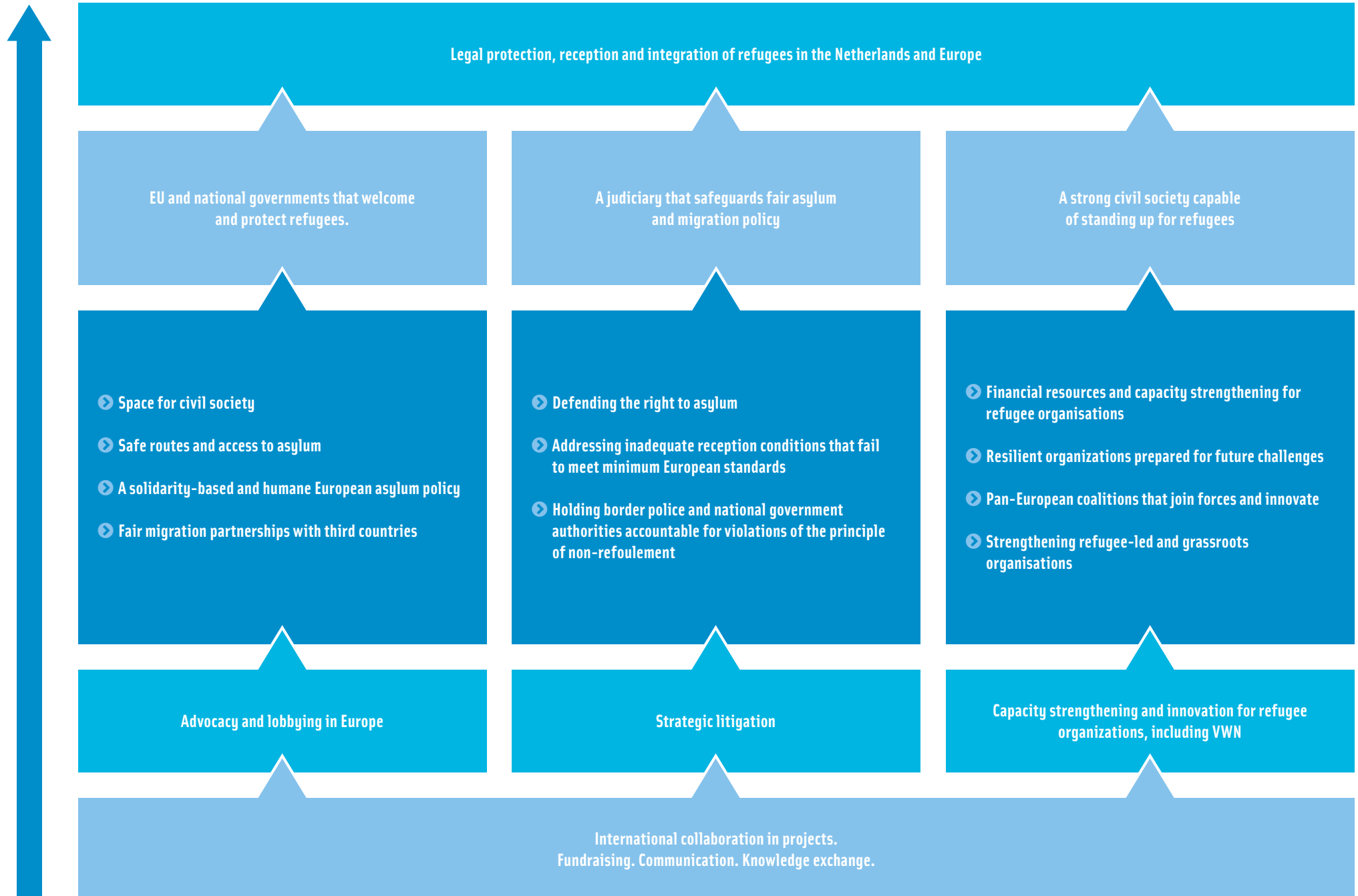
We want to amplify refugees' voices by strengthening refugee-led organisations. Supporting these organisations and involving them in our work focuses us on their lived experience and expands the inclusiveness of the social movement committed to refugees in Europe. In this way, we ensure that our efforts align with the needs of the people with and for whom we work.

What we are going to do differently:

- Strengthen our strategic focus on coalitions and cooperation with NGOs outside the Netherlands.
- Prioritise roundtables, expert meetings and capacity-strengthening activities in order to achieve maximum impact with limited resources.
- Explicitly use international communication for fundraising, policy influence and showcasing the impact of partners, projects and refugees' stories, while systematically sharing knowledge internally with our staff.



Our theory of change:



Our approach is organised around six core areas:

1. Advocacy and lobbying in Europe

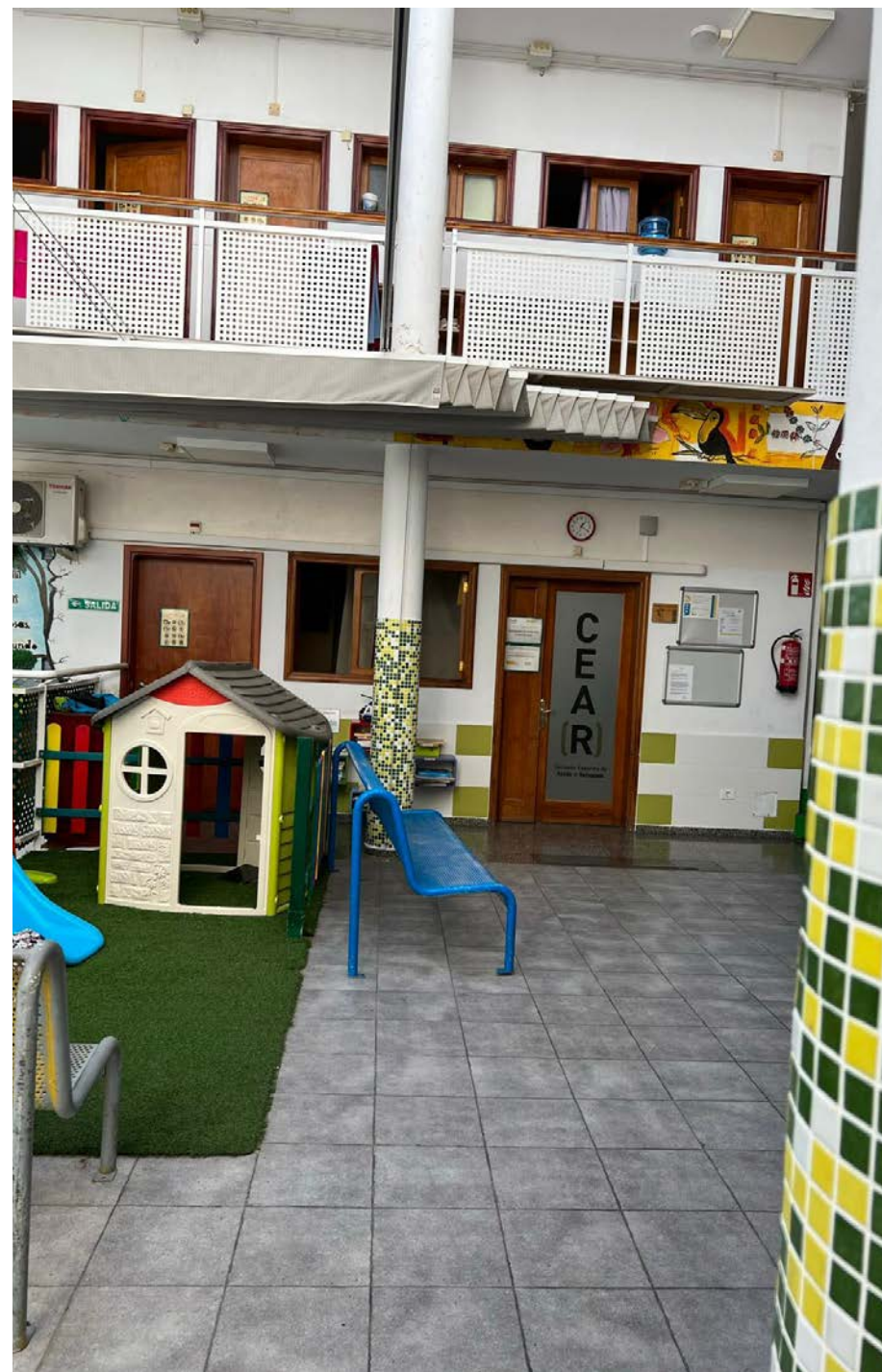
Our work in Europe is aimed at influencing European-level migration and asylum policy. We do this because those decisions have direct consequences for refugees in the Netherlands and beyond. The entry into force of the Asylum and Migration Pact in 2026 makes it even more crucial to continue to work closely with our partners across Europe.

Our advocacy focuses on the contemporary strategic challenges described in the previous chapter: protecting space for civil society, ensuring safe access to asylum, promoting humane and solidarity-based policies, and establishing fair partnerships with third countries.

Our activities:

- **Actively participating in European networks:** These include the External Affairs and Common European Asylum System (CEAS) working groups and expert meetings of the European Legal Network on Asylum (ELENA) and Asylum Information Database (AIDA). We do this in cooperation with ECRE. These networks provide a platform for cooperation, strategic knowledge exchange and policy influence.
- **Working with ECRE and other partners on advocacy efforts in Brussels:** We do this through regular, annual visits to the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Permanent Representation of the Netherlands to the EU.
- **Working with national partners in the Working Group on International Refugee Policy (WIV) on EU advocacy efforts in The Hague:** This involves the House of Representatives, ministries, the Special Envoy for Migration, and knowledge institutes such as the Advisory Council on Migration and the Clingendael Institute. The work includes aligning priorities and drafting joint letters on strategic themes.
- **Organising annual expert meetings:** Exchanging practical knowledge with European partner organisations and networks.
- **Participating in the Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways:** Held annually in Geneva, in close cooperation with the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Group.

"The visit to the field base of our Polish partner organisation Egala made a deep impression on me. They support refugees who have become victims of brutal pushbacks at the Polish-Belarusian border. It is up to us to tell people in The Hague and Brussels what is happening there. This impunity and these serious violations of European treaties must stop." – Femke de Vries, European asylum policy advocate, Dutch Council for Refugees



2. Projects as the basis for a strong monitoring and signalling function

Our international capacity-strengthening projects contribute to building partnerships and solidarity with our partners. In addition, they also play an important role in monitoring and documenting violations and holding authorities to account. Through these projects, we gain access to first-hand information and stories about border situations and human rights violations, which strengthens our advocacy efforts. Moreover, these partners become an important point of reference for questions related to country information, as well as a valuable source for local team leaders seeking answers for their clients.

Many partner organisations are small, have limited resources and are under enormous political pressure. Without our support, they would not be able to fulfil their role as watchdogs and protectors of refugees – and we would miss crucial information, allowing abuses to take place unnoticed. Strengthening these organisations in the context of shrinking space for civil society is therefore crucial.

Our activities:

- **Supporting partners:** Continuing small-scale solidarity projects and funding that strengthen civil society organisations at Europe's internal and external borders. These focus on the priority countries that are also strategically important to us.
- **Building capacity through training and knowledge exchange:** We help partners increase their effectiveness through training sessions, peer-to-peer learning, working visits and organisational support. The Strategic Litigation programme prepares partners for European courts, so the resulting rulings increase protection for refugees. At the same time, the knowledge gathered is shared with our colleagues through the intranet, coffee talks, VWN talks and expert meetings.
- **Strengthening the leadership of organisations and people with lived experience:** Our solidarity projects specifically focus on strengthening refugee-led organisations (RLOs).
- **Tapping into partners' expertise:** We actively use partners as a reference point for country information and draw on them as a valuable source for team leaders who are dealing with client-related questions.



3. International strategic litigation

We contribute to the protection of refugees in Europe by exchanging legal knowledge and engaging in joint strategic litigation with international partners. Governments that fail to comply with European laws and regulations are held accountable before the European courts, and we oppose attempts to question or ignore judicial rulings.

Strategic litigation both helps the refugee concerned and serves the collective interest, because a single ruling can have a major impact across Europe, including the Netherlands.

Our selection of countries and partners partly depends on the implementation of the European Asylum and Migration Pact and on whether litigation can lead to policy change.

Our activities:

- **Contributing to ELENA:** We make an active contribution to the ELENA and AIDA. In cooperation with ECRE, we contribute to legal knowledge exchange and the functioning of a European online legal forum. This contributes to the exchange of information between asylum lawyers in different EU member states and keeps our own knowledge of legal developments up to date. We also strengthen the role of the Dutch Council for Refugees as a platform organisation.
- **Cooperating on strategic cases:** Every year, we work with three or four European partners on strategic cases involving key themes such as pushbacks and other forms of border violence, access to and quality of asylum procedures, reception conditions, (border) detention and children's rights.
- **Organising expert meetings:** We organise annual expert meetings in which we exchange practical knowledge with European partner organisations and networks.

"In Greece, many refugees and asylum seekers are left without access to support. The pressure on refugee organisations is continuously increasing and access to the camps is becoming ever more difficult. That is why cooperation with other partners such as the Dutch Council for Refugees is so important. We must continue to raise our voices and work together on advocacy, fundraising and strategic litigation." – Mariana Fragkou, Greek Council for Refugees, Greece

4. Knowledge and development as a driver for innovation, capacity strengthening and solidarity

International cooperation is a driving force for innovation, strength and connectedness that helps us more effectively contribute to the legal protection and integration of refugees in the Netherlands and Europe. Our focus is not limited to border countries and the Caribbean part of the Kingdom, but also extends to western Europe. These countries face similar challenges related to reception and integration, and cooperation strengthens our advocacy and services. Now, at a time when many refugee organisations – including our own – are under pressure, we focus on knowledge and development that contribute to resilience and capacity. Solidarity and strengthening our own organisation go hand in hand. In this way, the international core team gives substance to the core values of the Dutch Council for Refugees: solidarity, professionalism and togetherness.

"It is important that within our organisation we pay greater attention to mental well-being, both for our clients and ourselves. Every refugee sitting across from us has been through a great deal. We need to know how to deal with trauma and how to protect ourselves from burnout. That is why I would very much like to organise the training on trauma-informed work at my locations." * – Ana Santana, Team Leader Integration, Dutch Council for Refugees

* This training was developed by the Dutch Council for Refugees Academy in cooperation with the international team as part of the Erasmus+ funded project *Caring to Include*.

Our activities:

- **Driving strategic innovation and development:** Each year, we focus on a theme that reflects current developments and organisational needs, such as shrinking civic space, digitalisation, changing the narrative and labour market integration. Through desk research, roundtables and working visits, we purposefully expand our strategic knowledge and contribute to project development on important themes.
- **Strengthening capacity:** In cooperation with partners, we build communities of practice around key themes. We develop toolkits and, together with the Dutch Council for Refugees Academy, we organise training courses that contribute to strengthening services and organisational development.
- **Building solidarity:** We actively connect international knowledge with our daily practice through stakeholder communication. We organise regional tours, initiate peer-to-peer contact with partners, and share insights through coffee talks, the intranet, VWN Talks, team meetings and current affairs days. This makes our international work more visible and relevant to staff and volunteers.

5. European and international fundraising

Fundraising will be central to the International Team in the coming years. We will strategically use European and international grants and funds to support the core activities of the Dutch Council for Refugees: service provision, legal protection and advocacy in the Netherlands and across Europe. At the same time, fundraising strengthens our role as advocate and guide and lays the foundation for strengthening the capacity of our partners at Europe's internal and external borders.

Refugee organisations across Europe are facing major financial pressure. That is why we are joining forces and focusing on accessing international and European funding opportunities.

Our activities:

- **Collaborating in European consortia:** We actively use existing networks and partnerships to develop joint projects and apply for funding.
- **Working based on needs:** Our fundraising focuses on the concrete needs of the Dutch Council for Refugees, our partners and the target group. These include legal support, digitalisation of services (including the platform organisation), housing, labour market integration and support for vulnerable groups.
- **Cooperating within the organisation:** We coordinate between teams and departments (such as Fundraising, Projects, Policy, Services, Communication and Strategic Litigation) to use resources efficiently and effectively.
- **Strengthening international communication and stakeholder management:** We communicate our impact, expertise and solidarity through the stories of refugees and partners, connecting fundraising to broader public support and engagement.

"The Netherlands is Europe! That is why cooperation is essential."

– Sjoerd Warmerdam, Director BKOD, Dutch Council for Refugees

6. Communication and storytelling

The International Team is to make the international work of the Dutch Council for Refugees visible and recognisable, in the Netherlands and across Europe. Through strategic communication, we strengthen public support, solidarity and policy influence, while increasing trust in our organisation and our partners. Communication is therefore not merely a supporting tool, but a way to make our substantive and political objectives more visible and understandable. Our communication is aimed at specific target groups and stakeholders, and it aligns with the positioning of the Dutch Council for Refugees as an advocate grounded in solidarity, professionalism and commitment.

Storytelling plays a central role in this communication. Stories are powerful because they make humanity and justice tangible, which strengthens solidarity, aids in fundraising and increases engagement. Externally, we share the stories of refugees and partners to illustrate what is happening at Europe's borders and why this is also relevant for the Netherlands. Internally, we connect colleagues and volunteers to our international work through onboarding, coffee talks and updates, so that they feel part of a larger whole. Stories connect not only people, but also policy, funding and convictions. For fundraising purposes, they demonstrate why our approach is indispensable.

Our activities:

- **Communicating with stakeholders:** Communication is tailored to each target group (supporters, policymakers, donors, partners and media) through the appropriate channels and messages.
- **Positioning the organisation:** We use bilingual and visually recognisable communication in line with the branding and positioning of the Dutch Council for Refugees.
- **Embedding structural cooperation:** Embedding communication is embedded in projects, campaigns and partnerships with European organisations, where storytelling and knowledge sharing contribute to collective influence. This cooperation is safeguarded through fixed formats and working processes, as specified in the internal "Huis op Orde" style guide. This ensures communication is structurally integrated from the start of every project.
- **Measuring impact and continuity:** We measure reach, engagement and policy impact in order to learn, improve and invest strategically in solidarity and public support.

4. Geographical scope



Our international activities are organised around five interconnected regions: the Netherlands, Brussels, the EU member states, countries bordering the EU, and the broader international level (see figure on the following page). Our annual international work plan describes our carefully considered choices about the countries and regions on which we will focus. These choices are based on where our efforts can make the greatest difference for refugees and the NGOs/RLOs that support them.

Within the EU, this concerns the following countries:

- Countries at the EU's borders where there are many refugees and insufficient capacity to provide decent reception and fair and efficient asylum procedures. This is often fuelled by political unwillingness and a lack of European solidarity.
- Countries at the EU's borders where there are fewer refugees but their protection is under pressure or local policies hinder the work of civil society organisations. For moral and strategic reasons, we support local NGOs in these countries.
- EU countries that participate in resettlement activities but have limited experience in receiving and housing refugees.
- EU countries in western Europe that operate in a context similar to that of the Netherlands. This enables the exchange of practical and strategic knowledge on themes closely related to service provision, such as asylum reception, housing and integration.

Based on the above criteria, we will prioritise the following countries over the next five years: Croatia, Greece, Italy, Spain, Poland, Bulgaria and the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands¹. In western Europe, we will also prioritise Germany, France, Sweden and Belgium.

Outside the EU:

- Countries at the EU's external borders are dealing with the consequences of the "externalisation" that forms part of EU refugee policy, some of which results from migration deals with the EU.
- To operate in a specific country, there must be a certain basis for a national asylum system and one or more independent NGOs with which we can cooperate.
- We want to be a reliable partner and, where possible, continue cooperation with existing partners for whom our support is vital.

Based on these considerations, we have chosen to focus on countries in the Western Balkans and Turkey over the next five years. In addition, based on strategic needs and new fundraising opportunities, we are exploring possibilities in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt.

Global: Fundraising

EU neighbouring countries: Strengthening capacity and knowledge exchange for NGOs, as well as strategic litigation and advocacy at the EU's external borders

EU Member States: Strengthening capacity and knowledge exchange for NGOs, as well as strategic litigation and advocacy at the EU's internal borders.

Brussels: EU advocacy, fundraising

The Netherlands: International projects involving national implementation and resettlement, safe pathways, and EU advocacy at the national level

¹ The islands of Curaçao and Aruba are constituent countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and, by extension, part of the European Union. Bonaire is a special municipality of the Netherlands. They are currently receiving large numbers of displaced Venezuelans and Colombians.

5. Working together as a professional organisation



The International Team is currently positioned under Advocacy. In the past, this choice aligned well with the focus of our international work: projects and advocacy at the European level. In practice, however, the team has evolved more broadly. International cooperation now touches on virtually all core tasks of the Dutch Council for Refugees: from strategic litigation to communication, and from policy development to knowledge sharing and service provision.

As a result, the role of the team has become increasingly multidisciplinary and cross-departmental. International work is no longer confined to a single domain but runs like a common thread throughout the organisation. It supports colleagues in their work, strengthens our knowledge position and connects signals from daily practice with international and European developments. To properly fulfil this connecting and supportive role, it is no longer appropriate to position the team within a single department.

Under the new strategy, the International Team is the core international team and is positioned directly under the Director of Strategy. This ensures that the team is well represented throughout the organisation and can connect strategic themes across departments.

This formally recognises what is already true in practice: international work is not a separate pillar but an integral part of our collective efforts to protect refugees and uphold their rights.

The composition of the International Team reflects this multidisciplinary approach. These positions comprise the core team: international coordinator, EU project and knowledge developer, two programme and partnership managers, and a partnership officer for administration & events. These people ensure the coordination of our international activities and strategic choices in cooperation with the Europe policy officer, who is also part of the Policy Influence team.

In addition, two liaison roles – the communication specialist and the strategic litigation coordinator – work closely with the international core team from within their own departments. This ensures that international expertise remains connected to the full breadth of our organisation. Furthermore, we are committed to representing our target group and aim for at least 40 percent of the team to have a refugee background.

6. Partnerships



Cooperation is the key to improving the protection and support of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe and the Netherlands. Because the Netherlands is an inextricable part of Europe, it is crucial not to limit our efforts to national partners, but to actively connect them with organisations and networks beyond our borders.



² A coalition of NGOs in the Netherlands working to advance the international protection of refugees.

- **In the Netherlands:** Dutch NGOs that also work across Europe (in particular Stichting Vluchteling, Amnesty International, Oxfam Novib and other partners of the Working Group on International Refugee Policy (WIV)²), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) and the international bureau of the COA, the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), and national funds.
- **In Europe:** networks in Brussels, including ECRE and the ELENA network, local and national NGOs, the AIRE Centre and the International Commission of Jurists, international NGOs working in Europe, UNHCR, and existing international NGO networks in areas such as resettlement, border violence and refugee rights.
- **Outside Europe:** local and national NGOs in target countries, international NGOs operating in those countries, UNHCR and relevant NGO networks, and international funding bodies.

Across all these regions, there will be a special focus on cooperation with refugee-led organisations.
Nothing about us, without us.

7. Funding



The international core team plays a central role in carrying out the core tasks of the Dutch Council for Refugees as an advocate and in supporting its role as a guide. This ensures that our international engagement remains firmly anchored and helps us work towards genuine refugee protection, inclusion and solidarity in Europe and beyond.

The international core team and the co-financing resources for the benefit of partners are funded through unrestricted resources, enabling this core task to be carried out in a structural and sustainable manner. At the same time, we develop and secure funding for EU- and internationally funded projects with national implementation. The resources from these projects mainly benefit national activities and, to a lesser extent, project management within the International Team.

Through this approach, we aim to externally finance 0.89 FTE, increasing to 1.89 FTE over time. This position falls within the flexible staffing structure of the Dutch Council for Refugees. The co-financing resources will initially be covered 75% through our own resources, decreasing to 65% over time. For the financing of international work, we prepare multi-year programme budgets and fundraising plans, which are updated annually. The focus lies on international private foundations, national private foundations with an international focus, and EU funding.

Greater international engagement also creates additional opportunities for private fundraising. In the coming years, we will invest in strengthening our network, thereby creating more opportunities to participate in international and EU-funded projects. We will increase our opportunities by not only acting as lead applicant but also forming coalitions. Clarifying the role the Dutch Council for Refugees can play in projects makes it more likely that we will be invited to partner in EU- and internationally funded projects. Those projects will help us generate additional resources that are used to support our core activities and strengthen our services.

Ambitions for 2026–2030

Year 1: ➤ Prepare and develop one to three EU- and internationally funded projects, including one as lead applicant
➤ Have at least one project approved
➤ Raise up to €200,000

Year 2: ➤ Prepare and develop one to three EU- and internationally funded projects, including one as lead applicant
➤ Have one or two projects approved
➤ Raise up to €500,000

Year 3: ➤ Prepare and develop two to four EU- and internationally funded projects, including two as lead applicant
➤ Have one or two projects approved
➤ Raise €200,000 to €600,000

Year 4: ➤ Prepare and develop two to five EU- and internationally funded projects, including two as lead applicant
➤ Have two or three projects approved
➤ Raise €600,000 to €1,000,000

Year 5: ➤ Prepare and develop three to six EU- and internationally funded projects, including two as lead applicant
➤ Have two to four projects approved
➤ Raise €600,000 to €1,500,000

8. Timeline in three phases

Our ambitions and activities are organised around three phases that overlap in time.

Phase 1: Continue and focus

We will continue what we already do well and focus on the core of our tasks: strengthening the capacity of partner organisations, advocacy, strategic litigation, knowledge exchange and communication. We will do this with a selection of partners and countries in line with the current development of the organisation.

Phase 2: Strengthen and develop

We will strengthen existing activities and develop new ways of working that align with the organisation's current context. This includes building new coalitions for European and international fundraising with national implementation, identifying new funding opportunities, creating a stronger network, and preparing project applications. This will further strengthen our existing advocacy coalitions and expert networks in Europe, allowing us to explore and test an operational role related to legal pathways and resettlement (for example, by playing a role in community sponsorship). We will also continue to improve international stakeholder communication aimed at our partners, supporters and internal audiences.

In addition, we will continue developing working methods that strengthen our network and partners in a cost-effective way, such as hosting communities of practice and roundtables. Knowledge exchange will play a larger role in this process, enabling us to strengthen the organisation through innovative developments in challenging times.

Phase 3: Explore and innovate

We will explore new opportunities and strengthen our network by aligning more closely with refugee organisations across western Europe. To achieve this, we will develop a new approach that fits this type of partnership. This cooperation can drive innovation in our services and strengthen European advocacy. In line with developments within the organisation, we will explore how digitalisation and a platform can be used in an international context. We will investigate new and innovative forms of fundraising, including some through American philanthropic foundations.



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