



As we reflect on 2023, it is undeniable that another gruelling year has unfolded for refugees and allies, in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. The UK Government bulldozed through unprecedented and dangerous legislation, from the appalling Illegal Migration Act to the latest emergency Bill and treaty facilitating deportations to Rwanda. Despite our relentless campaigning, the political climate remains hostile, with safe routes still a distant hope for many refugees – often with tragic consequences. In 2023, we mourned the loss of at least seven lives in the Channel, knowing more are likely to be unaccounted for.

We have seen first-hand through our legal work with refugee families that children bear the heaviest cost of this hostility, left stranded in squalid camps across Europe or exposed to heightened risks of exploitation by smugglers. Shockingly, evidence revealed that at least 17 unaccompanied children in Europe go missing every day.

And yet, despite the persistent anti-refugee rhetoric saturating political discourse and dominating headlines, Safe Passage's dedication and determination have remained unchanged. We've never forgotten that behind the political football at play, it's the lives of real people – men, women, and children – that are at stake. And amidst the darkness last year, there was still light; we secured visas and won appeals for child refugees at risk of detention and put pressure on the UK Government to promise new safe routes for Afghan families seeking reunion. Our legal expertise across Europe saw us assisting hundreds of families in their efforts to reunite safely.

As always, we recognise that every win for refugee rights can't be taken for granted. That's why in 2024, we're ramping up the pressure on the current and incoming Government; with pivotal elections on the horizon worldwide, we're committed to ensuring that they translate into real progress for the rights and dignity of refugees.

2023 was a whirlwind year. We continued to drive the conversation on safe routes, launching a comprehensive report and associated campaign – Routes to Safety – and defending its recommendations at key events.

Our messages have gained momentum with the general public, with thousands rallying to support our call for new routes to safety, family and hope. Alongside our core legal work to assist children to reach safety, our Afghan Pro-Bono Initiative went from strength to strength, with media exposure leading to important wins for our clients. Our 'REUNIR' project in France saw Safe Passage expanding support for refugees from various conflict regions.

In Greece, we began broadening the scope of our work to provide legal and social support for refugee family unity in Europe, as well as continuing with family reunification work. And, despite fading public attention, our Ukraine Response Project team remained steadfast in providing essential aid to refugees fleeing the prolonged conflict. We also swiftly took on several legal cases to support Palestinians in Gaza seeking family reunion in the UK amidst the unfolding crisis, alongside conducting a Sudan response scoping project.

Once again, the voices of those with lived experience drove our work forwards; with Young Leaders helping us shape and deliver impactful campaigns last year, delivering powerful speeches at a party conference, sharing stories in the press, and honing their advocacy skills to new strengths. Meanwhile, our Experts by Experience Consultants continued to shape strategic decisions, holding us accountable to our aim to work with, not for refugees.

The year ahead is bursting with opportunities and possibilities – a golden opportunity for change. From pivotal elections that could shape the destiny of refugee rights, to new events and projects, and scaling our impact, it is an incredibly exciting time to stand with us and champion safe routes. To all who stood in solidarity with us in 2023 and will do so again this year – your continued support fuels our mission, and we couldn't be more grateful.

Magid Magid
Chair of Trustees,
Safe Passage



Hi, my name is Ayesha. I have been a Young Leader with Safe Passage since October 2022, and I am now a trustee for Safe Passage. My experience of being a Young Leader has allowed me to learn so much, participating in campaigns, contributing ideas, and working with fellow Young Leaders who are full of creativity, knowledge and wisdom.

Prior to joining Safe Passage, I kept up with the organisation's campaigns, frequently sharing them and emailing my local MP, leading me to express interest in joining the Young Leaders group. Alongside other Young Leaders, I got to embody and further reinforce the charity's values first-hand, working on our vision towards pushing for the right to be safe, and building on our mission to campaign for change and support the rights of refugees.

Amongst the projects and campaigns the Young Leaders have worked on in 2023, our #MessageInABottle campaign and work for reuniting Afghan families are among the most memorable and impactful. They saw us create a video campaign, developing the script and a social media campaign, which mobilised others to interact by creating and sharing their own social media messages for those who lost their lives in the Channel. Another very memorable moment was when we campaigned in Parliament and delivered our joint letter to the Prime Minister regarding reuniting Afghan families, with one of our own Young Leaders, Amir, even hand-delivering the letter. This was particularly important to me. Coming from an Afghan background myself, I have witnessed first-hand how much of an impact the failings of the Afghan schemes and the unreliability of the family reunification system have had on my community.

In the past year, we have seen a lot of tragedies occur with many losses of life at sea, and the right to asylum under attack with the Illegal Migration Bill being passed.

There has been political instability with the changing Home Secretary and a continuing hostile environment towards refugees; all of which has made me more grateful for Safe Passage. In times of such instability, Young Leaders have had one another and the organisation to lean on, allowing ourselves to support one another with the emotional impact of this changing political climate, and working together to fight for the change that we so desperately want to see. The Young Leaders' group will continue to work hard in 2024 to bring about change and increase our impact.

As a Young Leader, I have been able to see, feel and experience the organisation's values in practice, convincing me to apply to join the Safe Passage Board. As a new trustee, I now look forward to seeing what the following year has in store for our organisation, and I hope we can push further for change. Together, we will keep fighting for the right of refugees to be safe; safe to be with their families and safe to rebuild their lives. This past year has seen a lot of growth and learning for the organisation, and I am confident we can rise to the challenges that 2024 will bring.

I look forward to seeing what the year ahead holds for Safe Passage and hope you can continue with us on this journey.

Ayesha Aziz

Trustee and Young Leader
Safe Passage

REFUGEE FAMILIES
BELONG
TOGETHER





Our Vision

We believe every person has the right to be safe, safe to be with their family and safe to rebuild their lives. Our vision is a world where the people who need it have safe passage to a place of safety, family and justice.

Our Mission

We champion the rights of refugees and displaced people as they flee persecution, using the law to help them access safe routes to a place of safety. We work alongside refugees to campaign for change and build public support for safe passage for all.

"Safe routes are the best way to eradicate people smuggling and save lives. Refugees, including children and families, have no other choice but to risk their lives to reach sanctuary, a situation which fuels smugglers and traffickers. Unless we provide new safe routes and improve the existing ones, we will not stop the traffickers, indeed, we will only encourage them." – Lord Alf Dubs



We mobilised **25,528** people in campaigning and advocacy to call for safe passage and defend refugee rights

We used our legal expertise to support **1,069** people on the move to access safe routes and support

"It is extremely difficult having to advise clients knowing that for some there are safe and accessible routes whilst for others the legal journey will be long and challenging, with no guarantee of a successful outcome" – Safe Passage Lawyer

SAFE ROUTES SAVE LIVES

Most refugees have no other choice than to make a dangerous journey when forced to flee their homes, cross borders without papers, and put their lives at risk in the hope of reaching a place where they will be granted protection, reuniting with family and rebuilding their lives. Safe Passage focuses on defending the right to asylum and improving and increasing access to safe routes for refugees.

The routes we focus on are complex and ever-changing, and the need for safeguarding and protection is heightening. We've seen that where children are left in limbo due to the failures in safe routes, there is a further risk of trauma, mental health difficulties, and, in the worst cases, the risk of children growing frustrated with the legal process and trying to travel irregularly in a desperate attempt to reach their family. Many of these children go missing.

Working across borders, with teams currently in the UK, France, Greece and Poland, and other international partners, Safe Passage specialises in assisting children, including unaccompanied minors, to safely reunite with family in Europe.





629

People on the move provided with expert legal advice and protection advice and referred to relevant services

146

Total legal cases representing 12 different nationalities, with 440 family members supported

219

Families received social support, in-country or upon arrival

180

Sector peers trained through capacity-building workshops, with Safe Passage sharing legal expertise with other organisations to build knowledge of family reunion procedure

"I want to take this beautiful day to appreciate and celebrate one year of us working and fighting hard for my family reunification process. Today marks a year since our first WhatsApp call and I am glad to remember this date because it's clear how important it was and is to my journey" – former Safe Passage client

ROUTES TO SAFETY

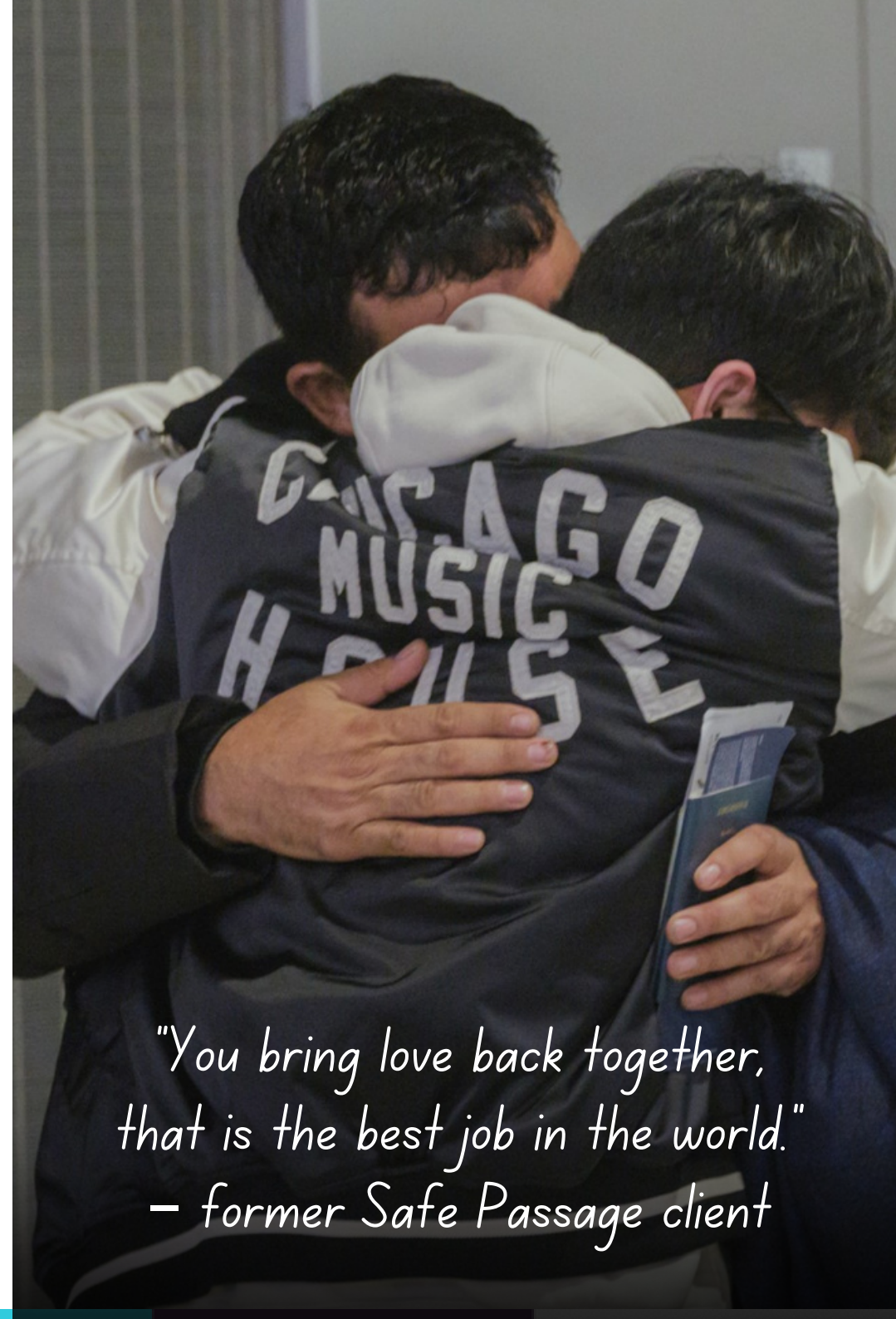
Due to the lack of safe routes, 2,842 lone children were forced to come to the UK by risking a dangerous journey across the Channel in an unseaworthy boat (from July 2022 to June 2023). 83% fewer refugees were able to come to the UK via safe routes, pushing more into taking dangerous journeys to reach community, family and safety. And almost 50% of the lone children we support, often fleeing conflict zones, are trying to reunite with their siblings in the UK (which is near impossible under current rules).

During 2023, we launched the Routes to Safety report and campaign, calling for the UK Government to urgently establish new safe routes – the only way to prevent more precious lives being lost in the Channel and dismantle the smuggling networks at their core. We're asking them to:

- Allow refugees to come to the UK safely, through an emergency scheme for those already in Europe who are fleeing conflict and crisis, and a refugee visa pilot for those outside of Europe who are fleeing persecution.
- Fix existing schemes used to reunite families, so that no more children are abandoned in camps and shelters, away from their loved ones.
- Protect the universal right to seek safety by scrapping cruel and unworkable anti-refugee policies, like the Refugee Ban Act and Rwanda plan.
- Agree a new framework with the EU and European countries for a smarter, cross-border response to Channel crossings.

You can read the full report and take action with us at:

WWW.SAFEPASSAGE.ORG.UK/ROUTES-TO-SAFETY



*"You bring love back together,
that is the best job in the world."
– former Safe Passage client*

"My family were Jewish refugees many years ago. The UK needs to stand by refugees and asylum seekers and help them now" – Sasha, Safe Passage supporter



CRISIS RESPONSE

2023 was another crucial and challenging year for people on the move, with global crises forcing the displacement of millions of people. We continued our groundbreaking Ukraine Response and Afghan Response projects, working alongside pro bono lawyers to assist many more people as the crises and needs became more protracted. In 2023, we were proud to:

- Support 273 Afghan family members through our Afghan pro bono projects via legal advice, casework and representation.
- Secure visas and support the reunion of 47 Afghan families so that they can have the best possible start in their new homes.
- Represent 154 children from Ukraine, via our Ukraine Response Project.
- Support 54 arrivals from Ukraine to the UK.
- Win the LawWorks award for 'Most Effective pro-Bono Partnership' and be highly commended in The Lawyer's Awards and the FT Innovation Awards for our Afghan work in the UK. Our Ukraine Response Project was also recognised as 'Standout' at the FT Innovation Awards.

2023 saw even more families torn apart by war and persecution in new and ongoing crises, prompting us to explore the need and feasibility of Sudan Response and Gaza Response programmes. These revealed the desperate need for legal assistance to reunite children with their family members in Europe. By the end of the year, we had taken on some test cases for children stuck in Gaza wishing to reunite with family in the UK, and families fleeing Sudan seeking legal assistance to reunite safely in France.

We worked collaboratively with partners across Europe as well as people from Sudanese communities and actors on the ground in Israel and Palestine, to exchange best practice, gather evidence and safeguard children and families on the move. We aim to build on the impact of our ongoing projects in the year ahead, by using our expertise to ensure that more families fleeing dangerous conflict zones can be together in safety.

ANNA'S STORY

Born during the global pandemic, baby Anna*'s young life took a distressing turn when her mother, Bella*, was denied asylum in Greece and became undocumented, leaving her without any financial resources. When Anna was just 11 months old, Greek child protection services saw Bella struggling and removed baby Anna from her. Bella left the country heading for France, feeling completely heartbroken, and devastated to leave Anna alone in Greece.

Bella sought safety in France, but sadly the French authorities also refused her application for asylum. This is when our team was contacted to help her reunite with baby Anna. We feared it might never be possible because she didn't have legal residency in France, but we worked tirelessly to secure Bella's legal status in France. A glimmer of hope emerged when we discovered a vital family link through Bella's new partner, who has French citizenship. Leveraging this newfound connection, we were able to build a strong legal case, eventually obtaining a residence card for Bella. After extensive efforts, we finally received the long-awaited green light for Anna to join her mother in France and she arrived safely in June 2023.

* names have been changed to maintain confidentiality



LEADING CHANGE

“I am Abdulrahman Bdiwi, a member of the Young Leader group and one of the Expert by Experience Consultants at Safe Passage. For the last 18 months, I have been working and volunteering with teams across the organisation. I've had the pleasure of contributing to the establishment of meaningful involvement for individuals with lived experience of seeking safety at all levels. Collaborating with many teams, including HR, I have been actively involved in adapting new policies that empower individuals like me to bring about impactful changes, emphasising well-being considerations and addressing the unique challenges faced by those with lived experience. I'm proud that we have worked together at Safe Passage to develop a fair compensation policy for lived experience involvement. We have been working to increase the number of staff members with lived experience and become a more diverse and inclusive organisation.

Like many other Young Leaders, I've played a key role in providing input on the recruitment of Safe Passage's Interim CEO, staff members, and trustees. I've had the opportunity to engage with funders, ensuring that the voices and perspectives of individuals with lived experience are valued and integrated into the organisation's strategic decisions. When Safe Passage explores how to respond to external humanitarian crises, our views and opinions are taken into consideration. Being part of Safe Passage has had a significant impact on my personal and professional journey. My inputs were taken seriously and acted upon, which boosted my confidence and allowed me time to develop my skills and relationships. The dedication of Safe Passage to working 'with - not for' to ensure meaningful involvement for members with lived experience is truly commendable, and I am immensely proud to be an integral part of this conscious and transformative journey.”



OUR FINANCIALS

During 2023, we continued to develop and grow our team, strengthening our foundations, defending refugee rights as they came under attack and responding to emerging global crises.

Safe Passage generated funds from diverse sources and remains committed to transparency around our funding sources and how we utilise donations towards our mission.

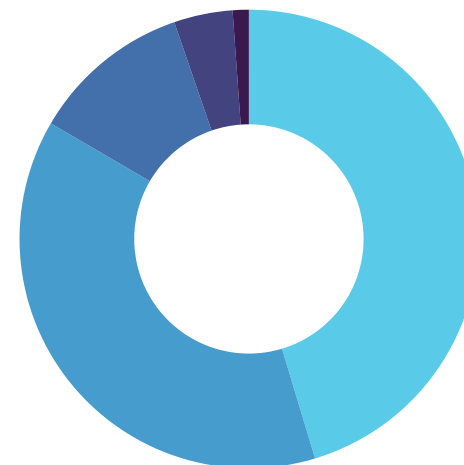
Thank you for your continued support in making Safe Passage's vital work with refugees possible.



Expenditure

- Legal (UK, FR, GR) – £887,220
- Finance and Operations – £744,944
- Campaigning and Advocacy – £334,794
- Fundraising - £179,429
- Safeguarding and Protection – £151,720
- Governance - £15,084

TOTAL £1,977,741



Income

- Trust and Foundations - £887,220
- Donations - £744,944
- Sponsorship - £221,370
- Gift Aid - £81,051
- Other - £22,237

TOTAL £1,956,822

NB: The figures shown reflect income and expenditure records prior to our audit. There may be slight variance when records are consolidated for our 2023 Annual Report.

LOOKING AHEAD

These are challenging times for all of us, not least for people seeking safety with their families. 2023 was marked by the emergence of new and ongoing humanitarian crises and an extended cost-of-living crisis. We remain determined and committed to reuniting families in a place of safety and calling for a more compassionate future for refugees.

We are excited to welcome a social support worker to our team in France who will provide invaluable assistance to families before departure or after arrival, to ensure that they have the best possible support as they look to build their new lives, and have access to rigorous safeguarding and protection measures. We will also welcome a new Advocacy Manager in France to drive forward our aim to increase access to safe routes across the EU. Our team in Greece have also prepared their new Development Plan for the years ahead which responds to the need for legal assistance for refugee families in Europe and will build awareness and capacity amongst refugee communities and sector professionals of the safe routes to sanctuary and reunification.

After the ongoing success of our award-winning projects for Afghanistan and Ukraine, 2024 will also see Safe Passage expanding our crisis response projects in the UK and France so we can apply our expertise to support those fleeing conflict zones - including Sudan and Gaza - and remain flexible to encompass additional nationalities and emerging crises as the needs arise.



2024 is a year marked by major global elections. As we head towards the UK General Election, with youth advocacy at the heart of our work, we will continue to stand against the Rwanda scheme and focus on our 'Routes to Safety' campaign, with the aim of influencing the current and incoming Government to implement new safe routes for refugees, and fixing current, unworkable schemes. The need for safe routes is greater than ever, as is the need for legal advice and support in accessing these routes, to prevent children and families in the most vulnerable of circumstances from risking dangerous journeys and putting their lives at risk in the hands of smugglers. We will not stop until refugees can seek safety without being forced to take dangerous journeys.

The start of this year sees the departure of Beth Gardiner-Smith as CEO, after seven years at Safe Passage. In Beth's words, "I couldn't be prouder of the impact we've achieved together, from policy change to the many families we've reunited. I'm moving on now confident in the knowledge that Safe Passage will continue to go from strength to strength under the leadership of our new Chair Magid Magid, the Board and the incredible passion and expertise of our staff and Young Leaders". We came together in early 2024 to celebrate the excellent commitment and transformational impact Beth has made, following the successful appointment of Dr Wanda Wyporska as Interim CEO. As we enter a new and exciting Safe Passage chapter and prepare for the challenges and opportunities the years ahead will bring, we want to sincerely thank you for being part of this community.



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We are hugely thankful to:

- ♥ All our incredible volunteers and trustees who generously gave their time and valuable skills.
- ♥ The 21 pro-bono partners and all our talented peers in the sector whose time and determination to ensure access to safe routes have been invaluable. Collectively, they gave over thousands of hours of pro-bono support during 2023.
- ♥ All our generous funders, donors, campaigners and amazing friends whose unwavering support has supported our work through the last year.

If you are able to support Safe Passage's vital work with refugees,
please visit www.safepassage.org.uk or scan the QR code.



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