



ECHO

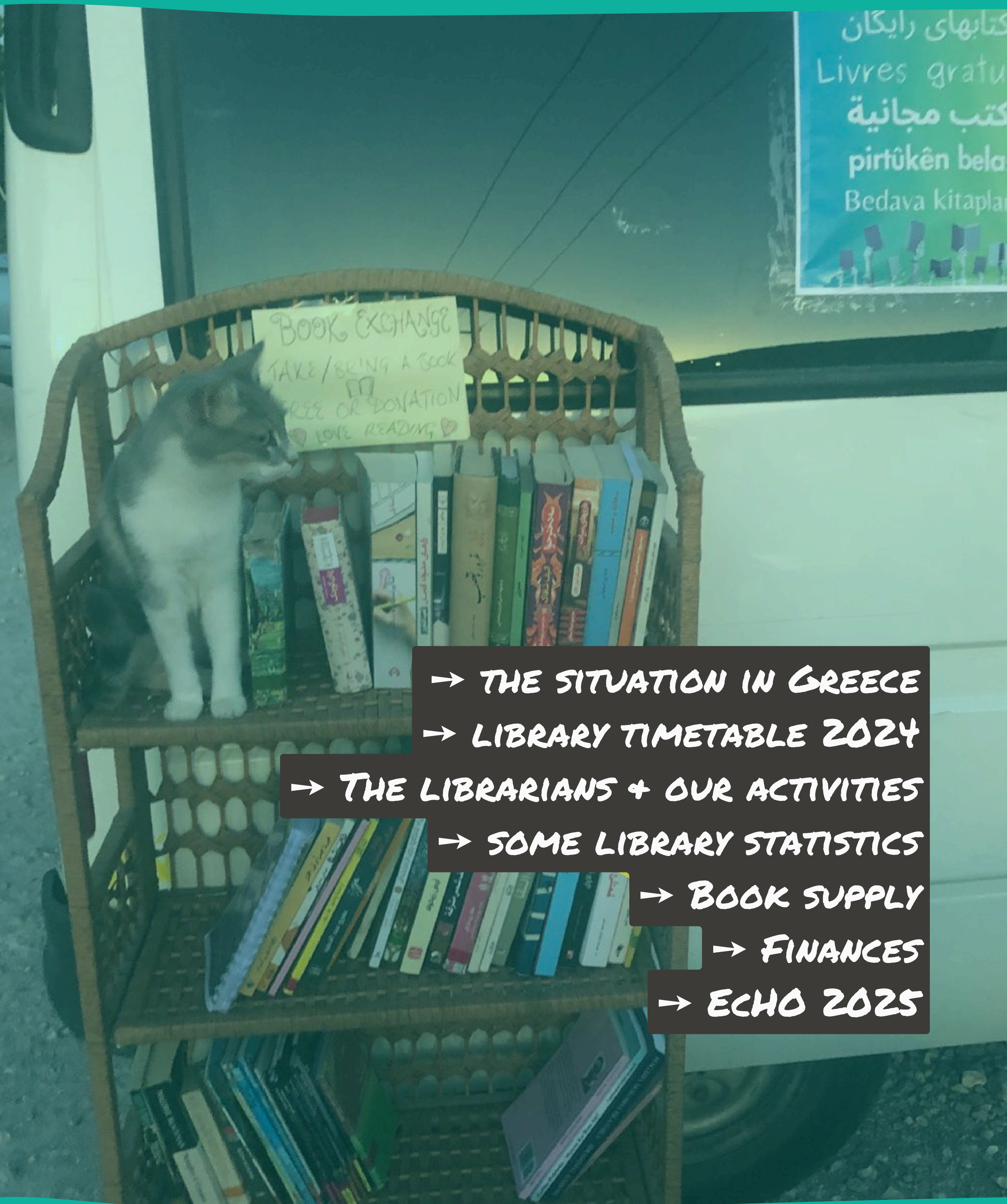
for Refugees



ANNUAL REPORT 2024



WELCOME TO THE ECHO 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



- THE SITUATION IN GREECE
- LIBRARY TIMETABLE 2024
- THE LIBRARIANS + OUR ACTIVITIES
- SOME LIBRARY STATISTICS
- BOOK SUPPLY
- FINANCES
- ECHO 2025

THE SITUATION IN GREECE IN 2024

Camps in Greece go under three different official names: RIC (Reception and Identification Centres), CCAC (Closed and Controlled Access Camp) and CAFTAAS (Controlled Access Facility for the Temporary Accommodation of Asylum Seekers).

CCAC are situated on the islands of Chios, Samos, Leros, Lesbos and Kos. RICs are identification structures; there are only 3 on mainland Greece (Fylakio near the Greek-Turkish border, Diavata near Thessaloniki, and Malakasa, near Athens). These are the only facilities in mainland Greece where people on the move can register their asylum claims. The camps we visit with our library fall under the name of CAFTAAS. Mainland Greece hosts [24 such structures](#), and since the end of 2022 they are the only form of accommodation “offered” to asylum seekers. The isolation faced by people living in these camps is no casual outcome, but the result of precise political choices by Greek and European authorities, and it is the reason our library exists.

Public data about camps is scarce at best. Since 2022, no official and comprehensive statistics have been published by relevant authorities on the Greek reception system. At times, civil organizations have been able to pressure the Ministry of Migration and Asylum into releasing at least partial [information](#). As of the end of 2023, 15,330 asylum seekers were resident in Greece’s mainland refugee camps.


Officially camps are responsible for offering different services: food, medical, psychological and social support, education, interpretation and financial support. In reality, access to such services is very limited, if not totally non-existent. This, in addition to the isolated nature of camps, lead to detention-like living conditions with no space for self-determination.

THE CASE OF INTERPRETATION

"Language is a key component in all stages of the asylum procedure... It is essential that the applicant, the interviewer and the other participants understand each other fully. Interpreters ... act as a mirror between all actors involved in the process."

On 14th May 2024, Metadrasi, which had been the main provider for interpretation for the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, ceased its operation due to the expiration of its contract and nine months of delayed payments. Over the following months, interpreters from the European Union Asylum Agency have been deployed to cover interpretation gaps in camps.

In refugee camps on both the mainland and islands, [official data](#) from [30 June 2024](#) showed only 69 interpreters covering all camps, equating to 1 interpreter per 267 people. This number is extremely low, particularly given the need for interpretation in multiple languages at each camp. In fact, 20 out of 32 camps had either one or no interpreters at all.



No indication of how interpretation needs would be provided long-term arrived until the very end of the year. Only on 17 December 2024 was the contract with Metadrasi for the provision of interpreters renewed. This has compounded and amplified a problem that was already affecting people lives before 2024. People saw their interviews postponed time and time again, often without the prospect for a new date, adding to the long waiting times spent in detention-like camps. Lack of interpretation also impacts every aspect of daily life for people in camps, causing multiple problems on key issues. People struggle to be fully understood when communicating their needs in terms of healthcare, education, transport to and from the city, etc.

Whilst it has been difficult to find accurate data about the camp populations, the Greek ministry for Migration was in fact fined a record 175,000 euros in April by the Greek Data Protection Authority. The fine was for Data Protection violations relating to their KENTAUIROS and HYPERION systems which are used for processing and monitoring asylum seekers. In fact civil society organisations had been criticising the use of these intrusive technologies by the Greek government since 2021. During our years running the library we have looked on in alarm at the use of biometrics, drones, AI and other forms of technology. As in other parts of the world, the borders of Europe have become a testing ground for honing new technologies that can be used to monitor and curtail freedom of movement and expression. The Greek government exploits the lack of international oversight (including a carefully orchestrated lack of external groups and organisations in the camps themselves) and take advantage of migrants' lack of knowledge and autonomy in these situations. This fine confirms to us what we already suspected - that the Greek government, hand in hand with private "security" technology companies, is collecting huge amounts of data on people and is not being transparent about how this information is used and not even being able to keep this information secure, constituting infringements on people's privacy and human rights.

All the data and the information included in this section are taken from:

1. [Major deficiencies in the provision of interpretation services in Greece](#), by Refugee Support Aegean, November 2024
2. [Persisting severe reception deficiencies in understaffed camps. Official 2024 statistics](#), by Refugee Support Aegean, September 2024
3. [Voices from the Camps. Living Conditions and Access to Services in Refugee Camps on the Greek Mainland](#), by Refugee Legal Support and Mobile Info Team, July 2024
4. [Refugee Camps in Mainland Greece](#), By Refugee Support Aegean, June 2024
5. [Lost for words: lack of interpreters puts asylum seekers' lives on hold in Greece](#), by Moira Lavelle, We are Solomon, March 2024
6. <https://edri.org/our-work/greek-ministry-of-asylum-and-migration-face-a-record-breaking-e175000-fine-for-the-border-management-systems-kentauros-hyperion/> European Digital Rights, 17th April 2024

ECHO LIBRARY AND THE CAMPS

ECHO visits 4 official camps on a weekly basis: Malakasa, Oinofyta, Ritsona and Thiva. Since 2022/3, both Malakasa and Ritsona are surrounded by 6-metre high perimetral walls, accesses are controlled by turnstiles and x-ray scanners. Oinofyta and Thiva are instead surrounded by high fences and barbwire. All camps have 24-hour private security at the gates and cameras feeding into a control room within the Ministry of Migration and Asylum in Athens.

Malakasa (both CAFTAAS and RIC) has a capacity of 3,021 people. As of December 2023, 2565 people lived in the camp, which is located 40km from Athens, near the train station of Sfendali. With 15 medical staff present on site, the camp provides 1 healthcare practitioner to every 171 residents.

Oinofyta has a capacity of 412 people. As of December 2023, 412 people lived in the camp, which is situated in an industrial area 60km from Athens, with no public transport in the immediate vicinity. There is 1 medical staff for every 52 residents and most people stay in small partitioned rooms with no access to natural sunlight.

Oinofyta residents suffer from the camp being so remote from any form of public transport. As of January 2025 residents say that there are no language learning courses available for adults and that the camp manager is never there to answer their questions.

Ritsona has a capacity of 2,884 people. As of December 2023, 2291 people lived in the camp, which is situated in a remote industrial area some 70km from Athens, and 10km from the nearest public transport available. With 9 medical staff, the camp provides 1 healthcare practitioner to every 255 residents.

Thiva has a capacity of 889 people. As of December 2023, 600 people lived in the camp, situated 5 km from Thiva town and 70km from Athens. There is 1 medical staff for every 150 residents.

Every two weeks we also visit the community centre Xeirapsies (handshake), near **Corinth** camp, which has a capacity of 876 people. Corinth camp is one of the very few camps in Greece located within a city boundary. It is also the only camp where residents are accommodated in tents. As of December 2023, 706 people lived in the camp and only 1 healthcare practitioner was employed for the camp.

ECHO also carries on its sessions in Lavrio, at the Kurdish Community self-managed camp just outside of the town. This camp survived the eviction of the main camp in town of the summer 2023, accommodating some of the evictees and giving a home to Kurdish and Turkish political refugees arriving to Greece.



LIBRARY TIMETABLE 2024

MONDAY

Our Monday sessions started with sporadic (due to weather) visits to Victoria square, followed by sessions at Notara squat. Victoria is generally quiet, with just a few regular children that often pass by and some regulars. It remains a key place for meeting regular users living in town.

As in the past, on several occasions we met people sleeping in the square, often sent to Athens from island camps, especially from Samos. Most people had already received a positive answer to their asylum claim, and were waiting for their documents. This is a process that can take months, and camp residents should be able to spend this time in the accommodation provided within the camps where they resided during the application. As we learnt, due to overcrowding, people were pushed outside of the camp and onto ferries to Athens with no support or information about the city they were moving to.

ECHO also continued its sessions at Notara, one of the few housing squats for migrants and refugee still active in central Athens. Opened in 2015, Notara has provided a community and safe accommodation for people on the move in Exarchia since then.

In November 2024, ECHO started running sessions in two emergency shelters for minors run by IOM (the International Organization for Migration). These structures provide temporary accommodation for unaccompanied young persons under 18 years of age. Children and teenagers are hosted for 1 to 2 months, before being transferred to long-term accommodation.

TUESDAY

Oinofyta

Tuesdays we continued to run small-scale kids' activities in Oinofyta, in a green space 5 minutes from the camp. The camp seemed to become very empty from early spring onwards which remained the case until the autumn, when a large number of new arrivals were transferred from the islands. The camp remains predominantly Kurdish. Later in the year we moved our session back in front of the camp to increase our reach and be more visible. Since then, sessions have been very busy, with increased number of loans and returns and participation from both adults and children. Concerns remain about the safety of our sessions on the side of the road. Camp security continue to refuse to allow us to park on the same side of the road as the camp.



Malakasa

Malakasa is comprised now of a closed and an open camp. As in other structures the incredibly expensive “security” biometric gates continue to be ignored, as residents go through a side door , checked by private security.

The library continues to be told to move by these security services, practically a slightly different location each week, supposedly because they don’t want the library to be seen parking by government authorities.

This year we had a steady stream of people loaning, predominantly Arabic-speaking young men, but also friends from Sudan, Egypt, Gaza and elsewhere. We had beautiful moments of music earlier in the year with friends from Iraqi Kurdistan to whom we managed to lend a Kurdish saz for them to be able to play inside the camp as well.

WEDNESDAY

Ritsona

Despite being the largest camp we visit, Ritsona’s sessions are some of our quietest sessions, with a small number of loans and returns, and little interaction with camp’s residents. Here we encountered issues with camp security, which tried to stop us from running our sessions in the public road on the side of the camp, and enquire weekly about our activities and our volunteers. For the first half of the year, we went to Ritsona in the early afternoon, before heading to Thiva. We switched in the autumn, to attempt to intercept more people moving in and out of the camp, with limited success. Since the summer we joined forces with a Solidarity with Migrants, a solidarity group in Athens who works closely with Ritsona residents, with one of their activists joining our team for the day.



Thiva

Thiva has given us some of the most vibrant and engaging sessions up to date. Over the past years, residents have changed consistently. Early in 2024, we spent our sessions with the Yezidi community of the camp, with a strong focus on music. As most of the Yezidis left the camp, Thiva became the hub for a relocation program to France for Sudanese citizens fleeing the war. Our sessions continued to be busy and engaging, with a lot of requests for language learning material (especially Arabic to French) and art supply. After the summer, we changed where we held our sessions at Thiva and met a group of new arrivals from Syria, which became regular readers of the library and brought with them a passion for chess. Two new volunteers from the camp joined our team in November. Throughout the year, we loaned a large number of books, especially in Arabic.

THURSDAY

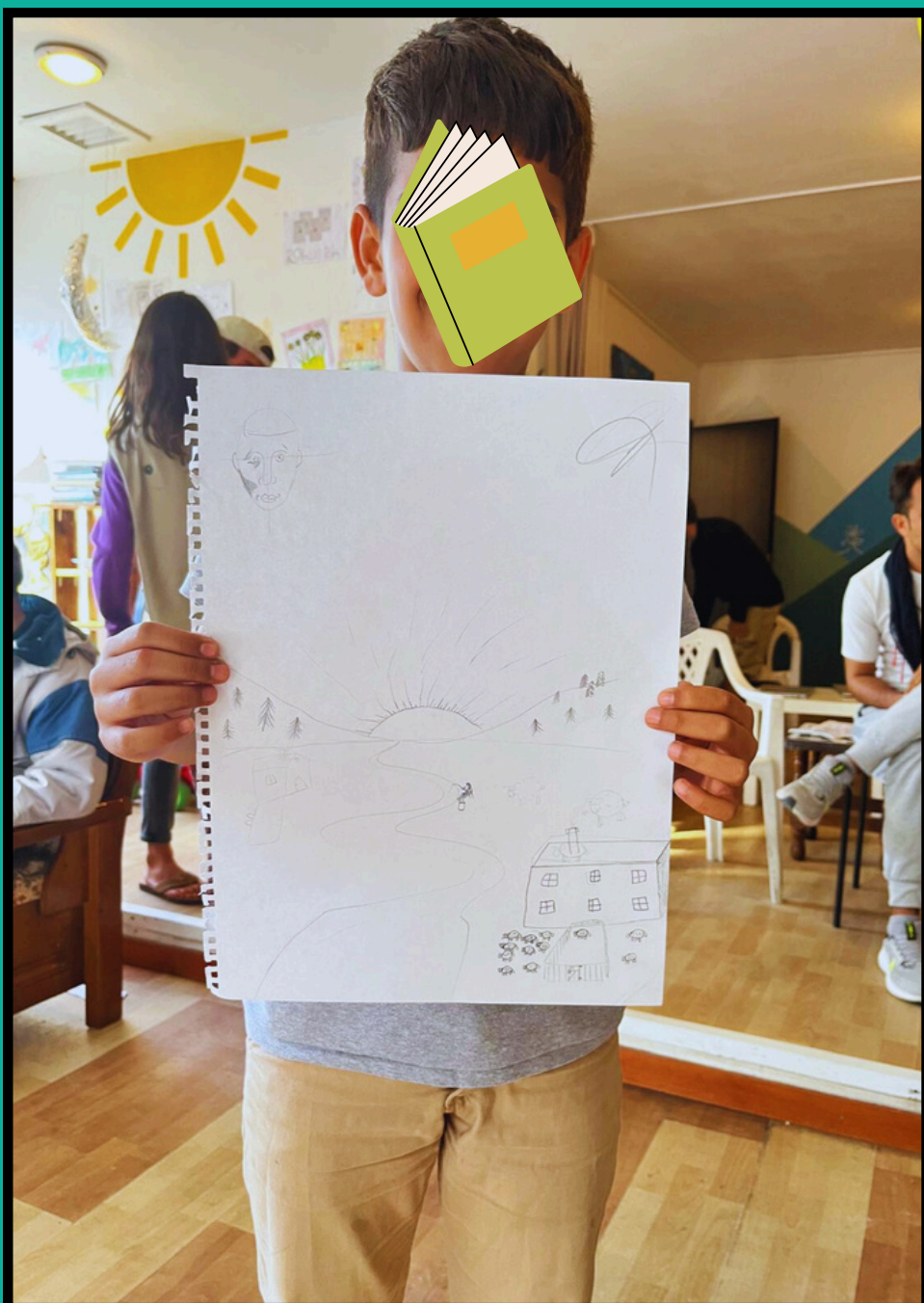
Lavrio

During the spring, we also restarted our sessions in Lavrio, which we interrupted after the eviction of the main camp in town in the summer 2023. The camp outside of town is smaller than the one that was evicted, and it was slowly repopulated over the winter 2023/4. Mainly adult men live there, both long and short term. We are always given a warm welcome and have loaned books in Turkish, Sorani and Kurmanji there.



Corinth

In the spring, we started collaborating with the Xeirapsies (handshake) community centre in Corinth. It is a small community space, with freeshop, cafe, a small library run by a group of organization working closely with the residents of the Corinth camp. As the community centre is only a few minutes walk from the camp, this was our way to start going back to Corinth after having to stop our sessions in 2022. Since then, we've been running our sessions in front of Xeirapsies every two weeks, getting to know the communities living the camp and the volunteers running the centre.



THE LIBRARIANS AND OUR ACTIVITIES



Over 2024, many people helped our library by volunteering their time and energy to the project. Karin, who had joined our team in September 2023 became central to our activities, coming along on both Tuesdays and Wednesdays for the entire year. It was extremely sad to see her leave at the end of December, as she relocates to Finland. Tulsi, our most long-term volunteer, continued to come with the library every Tuesday. Carlos joined the library at the beginning of the year and found his space supporting us on Thursdays in Lavrio and Corinth. Ahmad, a friend and member of the Athens-based art space Boat Collective, came along to Ritsona and Thiva for the first months of the year, supporting us with the Farsi and Dari speaking communities. Over the autumn, we were joined by Oli, Ondina, Maddie, Maya and Kieran, who together supported the library each day of the week, with Oli and Ondina also taking on driving our library van. Over the year, Fares, Nawaf and Mohammed from Thiva joined in various ways our team: Fares by helping us collecting books inside the camp, and Nawaf and Mohamed by joining us in running the sessions in Thiva and Ritsona.

Echo continued and started several collaborations: we strengthened our relationship with Refugee Legal Support, hosting several legal support drop-ins during our sessions. In April ECHO's coordinators spoke with students of Edinburgh University who were visiting Athens on a study trip. We talked about migration, borders, the camp system and the role of the library in trying to traverse these artificial borders.

In May we participated in Kypseli Mundial, a grassroots antiracist football tournament and festival and in July we participated for the second time at the Athens Anti-racist Festival.

As mentioned above we started new collaboration with Xeirapsies community centre in Corinth. In addition we are trying to improve collaborations amongst groups active in supporting the camp populations, including Project Dove, Solidarity with migrants and Rosa through a monthly meeting of all organizations visiting the camps. We are working on a new project for 2025 with Generation 2.0 RED involving giving people information about their labour rights here in Greece.

After last year's success, we ran another gin night fundraiser in November. The event was held at the British School at Athens and open to all. We raised an amazing 2080€ (£1,720.17) as well as a lot of awareness about the work of ECHO and the situation at the camps. The money has already made a big difference to a friend at Oinofyta who was struggling to feed her family of three very young children without financial support, as well as a former resident of Ritsona sleeping rough in Athens.



For us it was an amazing opportunity to reach out to people here in Athens. We consider it part of the library's work to build awareness about the refugee camps and asylum system here and Greece's role in the EU's "Fortress Europe" border policies.



A big thank you to Tulsi and the head of the British School of Athens Rebecca Sweetman for their organisation and support of our work.

2024 LIBRARY STATISTICS

This year we loaned 1164 books and by the end of the year 774 were returned, which represents 66% returns rate. This is more than last year and slightly lower than 2022, but it seems in line with our loans rate once our camp access was fully restricted.

This year has seen the reduction of Farsi languages loans, which in previous years was more or equal to Arabic language loans. It is unclear why we are not managing to engage Farsi speakers as much as before, but it is something to bear in mind for next year. In addition there is an increasing proportion of men that are loaning books, which also is worth considering, to ensure maximum access for women too. However, when you consider the overall population of the camps is slightly dominated by men, this statistic makes a little more sense.

WHO BORROWS?

69% male

40% between 20-25 years old

WHERE AND WHAT?

Malakasa: 297 (26%)

Ritsona: 222 (19%)

Thiva: 211 (18%)

Oinofyta: 108 (9%)

Korinthos: 108 (9%)

WHAT LANGUAGES?

30% Arabic

29% English

16% Farsi

9% Turkish

5% French

3% Kurmanji

2% Somali

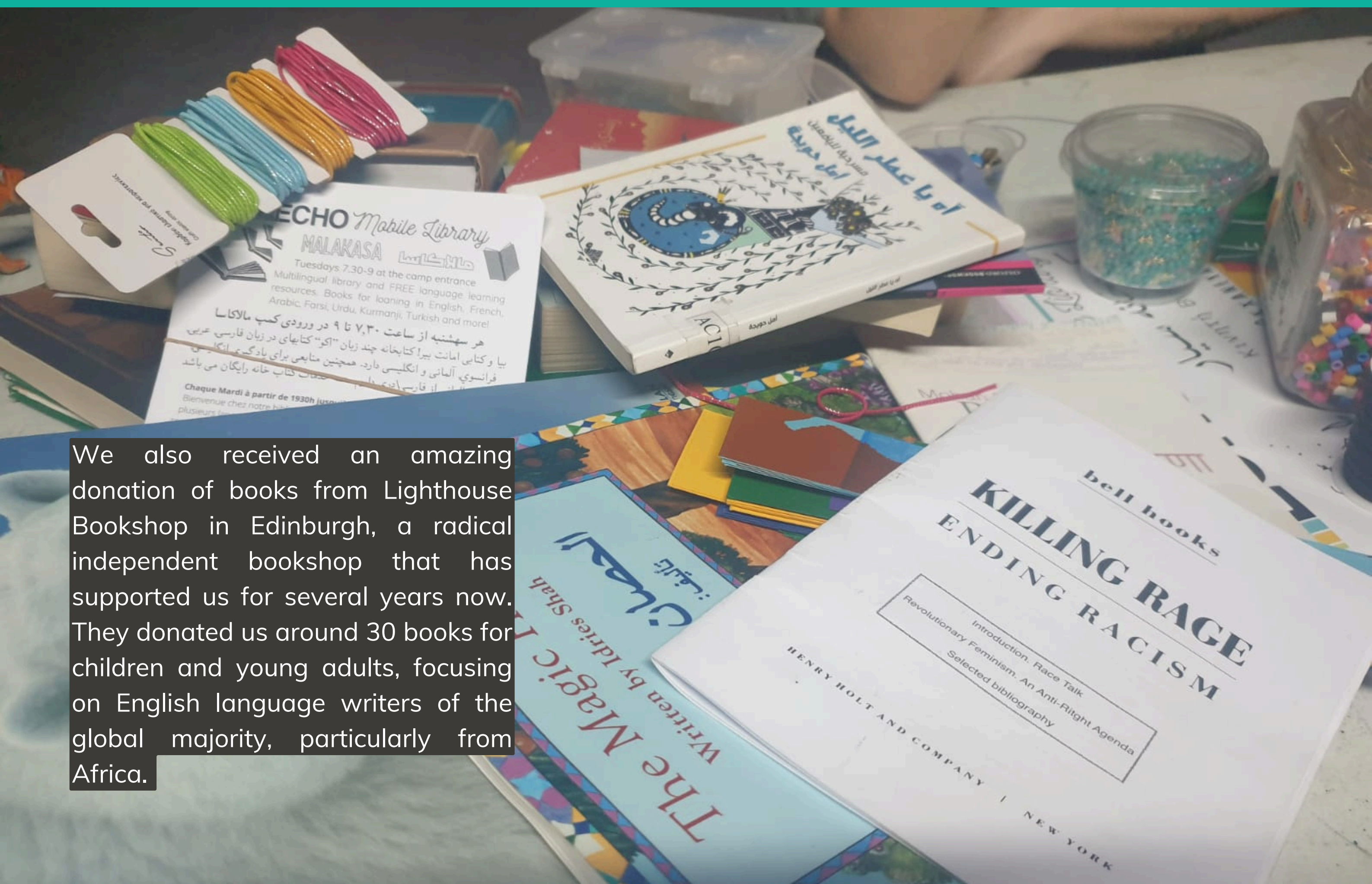
BOOKS

This year we invested in a number of new Arabic books at the start of February. Becka was able to hand pick books and fulfill specific requests at Dar al Janub, an Arabic bookshop in Berlin. Aside from this we have had sporadic donations of Arabic books from a friend of the library who goes regularly to Cairo. We also were donated many books from the International Prize for Arabic Fiction shortlist.

Another friend managed to bring 20 or so new Farsi books back with her from Iran in March and in May another friend donated a number of books in Arabic and, amazingly for us, Somali. These went straight into the library. A friend of Karin has also added to our modest Portuguese collection.



For French books we have received several small donations from the Institut Francais here in Athens, as well as through a contact in Marseille. At the end of the year Becka sent about 20 secondhand French books through from Belgium. We would still like to build on our French collection, but it has certainly improved dramatically in its diversity and representation of non-European writers. We also added a little to our Turkish teenagers collection, but much remains to be done in that area, according to our latest users!

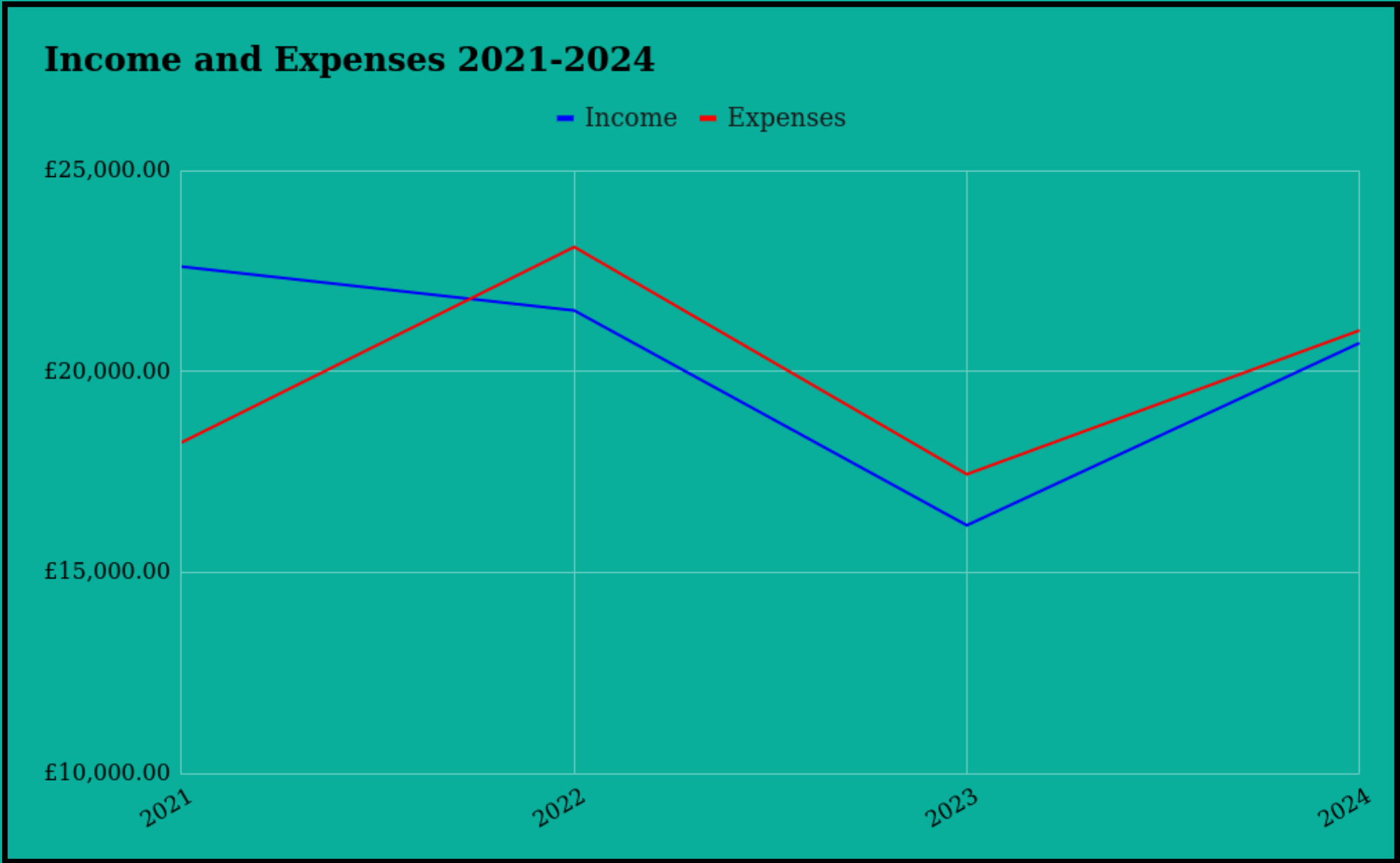


We also received an amazing donation of books from Lighthouse Bookshop in Edinburgh, a radical independent bookshop that has supported us for several years now. They donated us around 30 books for children and young adults, focusing on English language writers of the global majority, particularly from Africa.

FINANCES

Expenses:
£21,024.19

Income:
£20,707.74



In 2024, we spent £21,024.09 and received £20,707.74. We increased our expenses from the previous year, especially due to a small increase in the stipend of the two coordinators, from £500 to £650 monthly. As per our income, over 2024 we had to make do without two of our major sources of funding from the previous years. Thighs of Steel did not run their 10-weeks bike ride from the UK to Athens, and LUSH Foundation decided not to fund our library. We managed to keep up with the library needs, especially thanks to a generous support from EMMAUS Aaland.

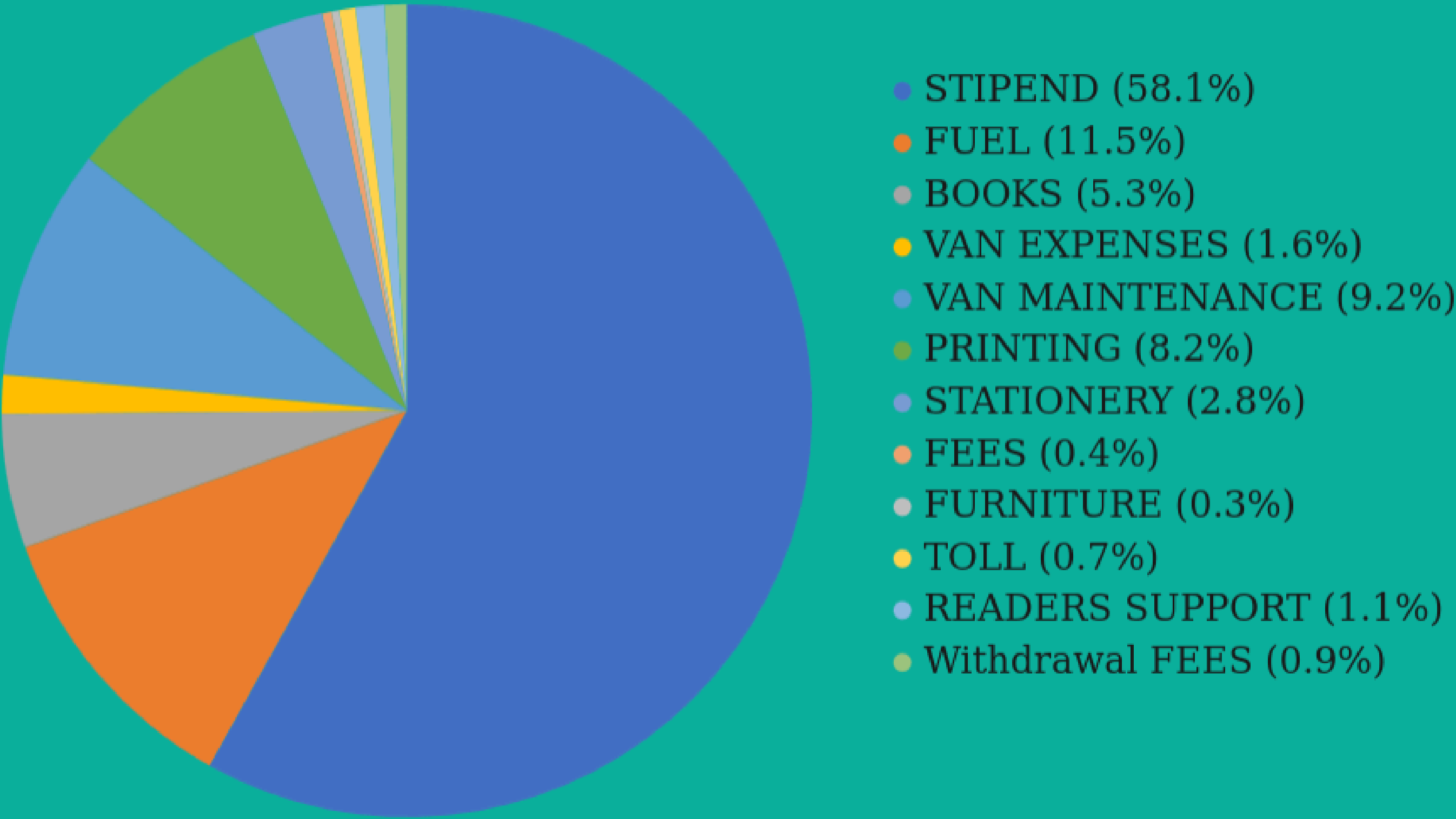
ECHO Balance 2024



Comparison of main expenses 2022-2024

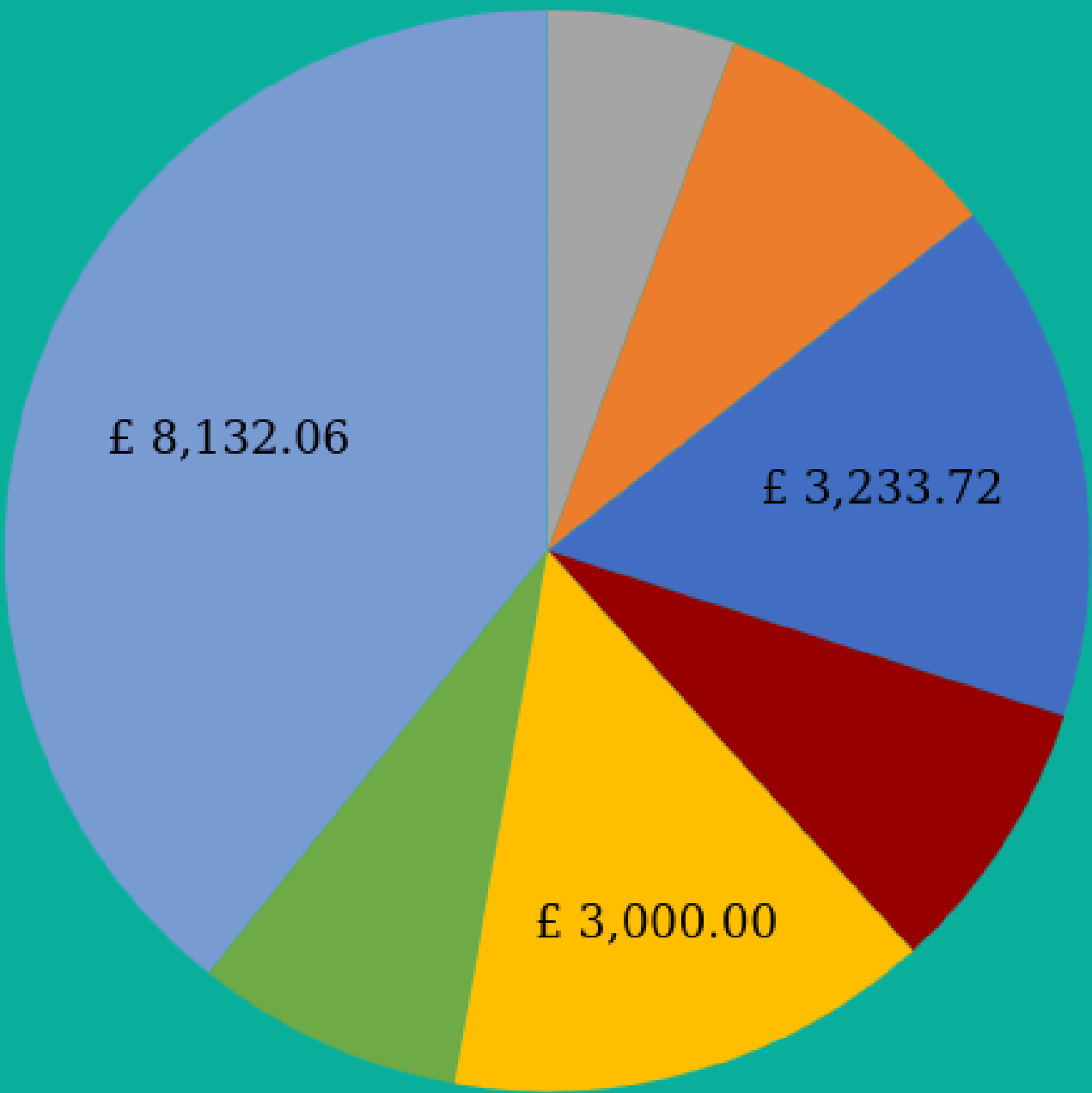
Spending by Category	2024 (£)	2024 (%)	2023 (£)	2023 (%)	2022 (£)	2022 (%)
STIPEND	£12,212.02	58.1%	£10,544.56	60.44%	£14,599.98	63.20%
FUEL	£2,407.74	11.5%	£2,165.00	12.41%	£2,984.64	12.92%
VAN MAINTENANCE	£1,934.34	9.2%	£1,674.84	9.60%	£1,845.21	7.99%
PRINTING	£1,721.86	8.2%	£469.06	2.69%	£841.74	3.64%
BOOKS	£1,122.03	5.3%	£527.31	3.02%	£873.32	3.78%
STATIONERY	£591.01	2.8%	£426.72	2.45%	£339.02	1.47%
VAN EXPENSES	£326.11	1.6%	£304.89	1.75%	£643.74	2.79%

Expenses 2024



INCOME 2024: £12,575.68 — By source	
Donation CHUFFED.ORG	£ 1,156.26
Donation GLOBAL GIVING	£ 1,812.92
Donation INDIVIDUAL	£ 3,233.72
Donation FUNDRAISING	£ 1,720.17
Grant EMMAUS Aaland	£ 8,132.06
Grant FORREFUGEES	£ 3,000.00
Grant DO:STIFTUNG	£ 1,652.62

Income by source



- Donation CHUFFED (5.6%)
- Donation GG (8.8%)
- Donation INDIVIDUAL (15.6%)
- Donation FUNDRAISING (8.3%)
- Grant FORREFUGEES (14.5%)
- Grant DO STIFTUNG (8.0%)
- Grant EMMAUS (39.3%)

ECHO 2025

We move into 2025 with trepidation at the state of global affairs but with the energy to keep our little library community going at a time where it seems more needed than ever.

Our focus needs to be on stabilising our funding streams and we have some suggestions from friends and volunteers about potential new sources.

At the end of 2024 we managed to finally register the library project as a Greek AMKE. Whilst this means an increase in administration costs, we are hoping that it will make it easier for ECHO to apply for EU-based funding.

Thank you for being a part of ECHO's library family.

