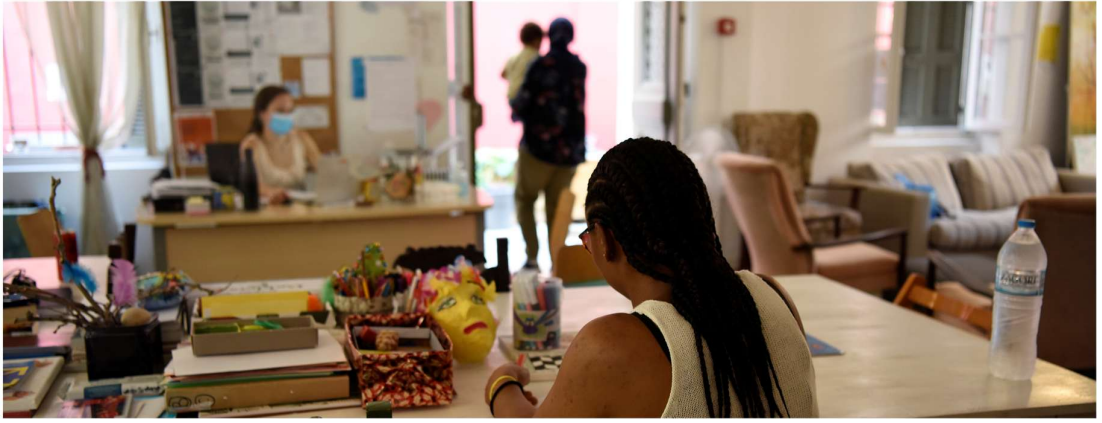


Annual Report 2025

Introduction: 9 Years of SAO

2025 was a year in which the environment for humanitarian work in Europe became noticeably more challenging. The withdrawal of key international donors such as USAID, the rise of anti-migration rhetoric and the resurgence of right-wing populist movements have made conditions at Europe's external borders increasingly difficult. At the same time, media attention on events in Greece – and particularly on the Aegean islands – has all but disappeared, even though thousands of women and families continue to live there in precarious conditions.

Against this difficult backdrop, SAO has been demonstrating for almost a decade what consistency and expertise can achieve. Since 2016, we have built up a structure on Lesbos and in Athens that not only provides short-term support for women fleeing their homelands, but also opens up long-term prospects for them. Our teams of qualified female professionals support, accompany and empower survivors of war and violence through an approach that holistically combines empowerment, psychosocial support and integration.

This consistent work, underpinned by trust, empathy and respect, ensures that SAO continues to operate as a reliable partner organisation on the ground, whilst other initiatives have long since been forced to give up. We invest in quality, stability and sustainability, whilst remaining open to collaborations that deepen our impact without diluting our vision. In 2025, we also successfully implemented agreed projects while making targeted use of synergies with partners to deploy resources more efficiently.

Given the extremely strained humanitarian financial situation, rising global uncertainties and falling donation income, the statement of changes in equity highlights the impact of these developments on the organisation's financial position. Despite cost-cutting measures, the reported annual loss of CHF 85,414.06 can no longer be fully covered by existing equity. This results in over-indebtedness, meaning that liabilities exceed available funds and reserves.

In an environment increasingly characterised by isolation and indifference, SAO stands for continuity, credibility and humanity. On the following pages, we show what this approach has achieved over the past year.

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SAO in Greece

1. Foreword by the CEO

The year 2025 brought unprecedented destabilisation to the humanitarian sector, affecting organisations of all sizes. Despite these challenges, the SAO teams on the ground achieved exceptional results, demonstrating their unwavering commitment by supporting displaced women with empathy and compassion in their search for safety, dignity and stability, far from war, violence and deprivation.

After eight years of stability, SAO has faced a critical financial situation since 2024: the withdrawal of government funding, changes in funding priorities, and a significant decline in private donations have led to a deficit. At the same time, existing structures have only been able to cope with the increased demands partially – additional support is crucial to safeguarding SAO's work.

SAO's staff met these complex needs through their commitment and expertise, working hand in hand with private and public stakeholders, donors, volunteers, and community members, enabling displaced women and their families to look to the future with a sense of security and confidence.

Our role is not to issue instructions from afar and perpetuate dependency. It is to promote autonomy and self-determination. Every woman who walks through the doors of our Day Centres brings her own story, her own hopes and her own resilience. Together, we work to ensure that their goals, needs and dreams find their place in a reality often marked by hardship and injustice.

Every day, displaced women remind us that dignity, strength and perseverance are universal virtues. What we sometimes need are people who are willing to stand by us until we are back on our own two feet. In 2025 – and in every year before that, and in every year yet to come – the SAO teams will be right here: standing by every single woman until her own resilience can carry her forward.



Tereza Lyssiotis
CEO, SAO Association Hellas

2. Our impact

The year 2025 was characterised by commitment, solidarity and tangible successes: our work has reached and empowered countless refugee women and their children. SAO continued to

provide its services, despite a year in which staff and beneficiaries reported that the space for civil society is shrinking, state support is minimal or non-existent, hostile rhetoric is gaining ground, resources are becoming scarcer, whilst government policy is becoming more restrictive.

2.1 Our impact in figures

In 2025

we recorded

6,963 visits from refugee women

3,850 visits from their children

we provided in-depth psychosocial support

260 women with **2,207** specific requests for support

we carried out

772 hours of informal Greek lessons

we provided

1,858 hours of workshops, seminars, information sessions, courses and activities **offered**

We distributed

thousands of everyday essentials, such as hygiene products, clothing, bed linen and nappies

we worked with

22 institutions and organisations in Greece (see point 9)

Each figure represents courage, connection and hope.

3. Challenges in the Greek context

Security, stability and normality – concepts that most people take for granted – are constantly put to the test in the lives of displaced people who have sought refuge in Greece. Women face these difficulties to a particular degree, as they are at increased risk of gender-based violence and human trafficking. Given this reality, a welcoming space for refugee women is not only valuable but also indispensable.

In Athens and on Lesbos, SAO provides just such a space: a place where women can express themselves freely, share experiences, lead and learn, receive support and develop their personal life plans. We aim to meet our clients' needs and address their requests while recognising and respecting their individuality.

Here is an example: access to key rights and administrative procedures for people with international protection status in Greece depends on several key documents issued by various authorities. The process of obtaining these documents is extremely complicated and often almost impossible for those affected to navigate. A stressful vicious circle often arises: if one document is not issued, the requirements for other necessary documents are not met. Without support from experienced social workers, this process is unmanageable for many affected women.

As highlighted in recent reports,

"Among the persistent obstacles to a dignified life for recognised refugees in Greece are a bureaucratic maze when it comes to obtaining key documents, a lack of housing, and restrictions on access to healthcare and other essential services. These obstacles expose many people enjoying international protection to homelessness and destitution, which constitutes a violation of the right to dignity and the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment."[1]

We aim to maintain the organisation's effectiveness through consistent service delivery in an increasingly restrictive environment, in which civil society is repeatedly challenged, and refugee women continue to face systemic legal, social and economic barriers. These barriers, documented by numerous organisations, are intended in practice to deter future arrivals and to obstruct those already trying to build a second home in Greece. The fundamental flaw in deterrence-oriented approaches lies not only in the infringement of inalienable human rights; it also lies in a persistent narrative that implies refugees have consciously chosen to flee their home countries.

[1] Recognised refugees in Greece, 2026 – Report – R.S.A.

4. Scope of work and clients

In 2025, too, the following three pillars defined SAO's scope of work.



Support to cover of basic needs



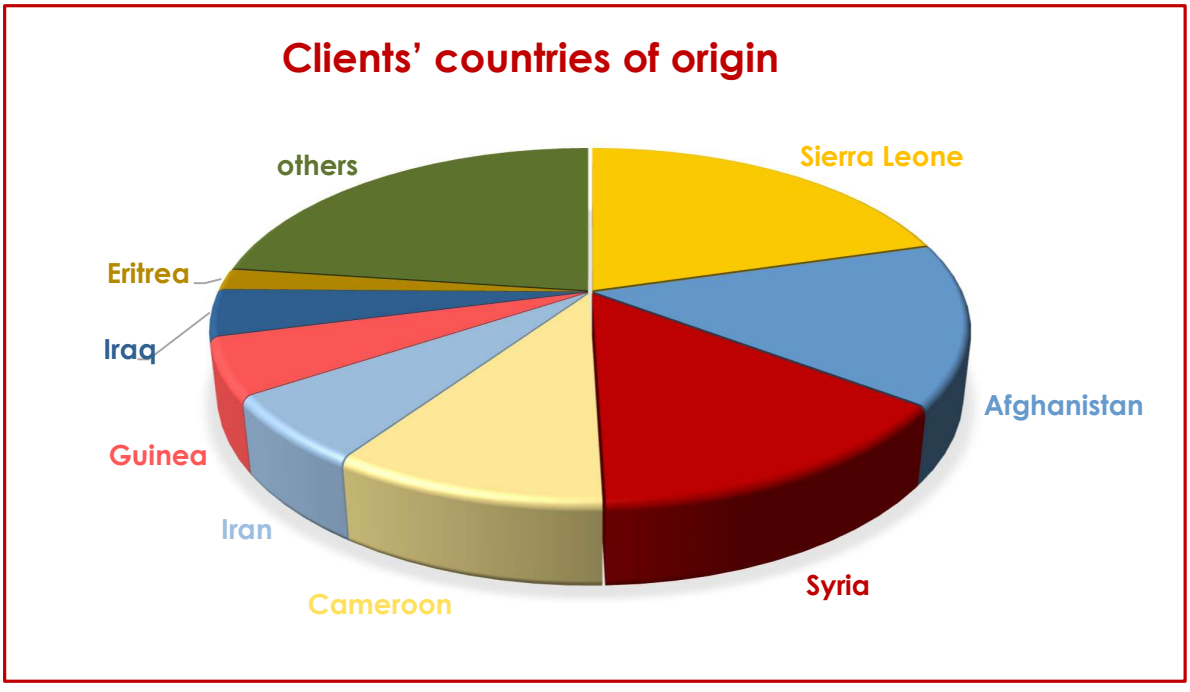
Professional psychosocial support



inclusion through education

We register particularly vulnerable women who have fled their homes and who are referred to us by the UNHCR Protection Group, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), community leaders and other contacts. Our clients are survivors of war, persecution (political, on the grounds of sexual orientation, etc.), torture, human trafficking, mutilation, and individual and systematic sexual violence.

Beyond the vulnerability associated with their legal status, most women in Greece face further risks. The most common of these are the experience of, or risk of, gender-based violence; pregnancy or the postnatal period; their status as single parents; and the fact that some are shipwreck survivors.



5. Female staff members

By the end of 2025, the SAO Association Hellas employed 14 staff members (specialists in sociology, psychology, social work, education and management) as well as cultural mediators from our clients' communities.

Our cultural mediators play a crucial role in ensuring the centres run smoothly, achieving our objectives, and implementing our activities. In addition to providing interpretation services, they offer context-specific explanations and cultural insights, thereby fostering mutual understanding.

We firmly believe that our staff must continuously develop their knowledge and skills. That is why we offer supervision and further training opportunities.



Team meeting at the Amina Centre, Athens

6. SAO day centres

Conditions on Lesbos and in Athens differ considerably and shape the challenges faced by refugee women at every stage of their journey. Our staff tackle these specific, ever-changing challenges daily.

On Lesbos, women are confronted with the limitations of the island's reception system.

Once refugees have been granted asylum and received their documents, they are permitted to leave the islands. Once they are in Athens or elsewhere on the mainland, they are expected to fend for themselves. Precarious living conditions are not the exception, but the rule. Even if relatives or social networks initially support them, that support has an expiry date.

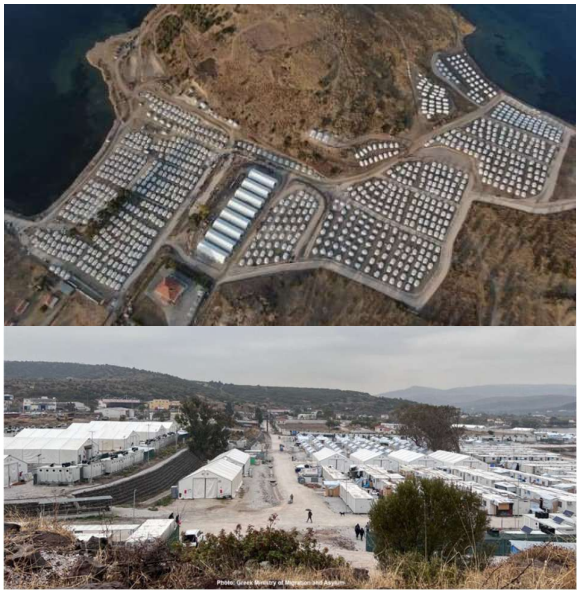


7. Bashira Centre, Lesbos

The Bashira Centre opened in 2017 and has since supported over 1,000 refugee women. Located in the town of Mytilene, it offers women, with or without children, who arrive on the island a safe haven and support to help them build a better life.

What makes Bashira so unique is the warm, homely atmosphere of the old townhouse. We hear time and again how much our clients feel at home at Bashira. We are particularly proud of this. For this reason, we frequently make our premises and our support available for initiatives led by our clients, who share their skills in self-led workshops.

7.1. Local circumstances



Most of the women we support live in the camp, where they submit their initial application for international protection. In the refugee camp, access to services is limited, living conditions are inadequate, and mobility is restricted.

On the very day they receive a positive decision, they lose access to food distribution and have one month to find accommodation. They do not necessarily receive the documents proving their protection status within this month, which makes finding accommodation considerably more difficult.

Even clients who **receive a negative decision lose access to food distribution** in the camp **on the very same day**. Worse still, they are then stranded on the island without any support or prospects.

As most displaced people leave the island after receiving a positive asylum decision, we support the majority of our clients on Lesbos for a maximum of one to two years. Staff turnover here is much higher than in Athens.

7.2 Services at the Bashira Centre

A small team of female specialists runs the centre and specialises in psychosocial support. As part of case management, clients are also supported in the following areas:

- Enrolment procedures
- Access to social benefits and healthcare
- Tax rights
- Employment rights and obligations/documentation for employment and contract terms
- Social security
- Opening a bank account
- Dealing with the authorities
- Asylum procedures
- Health services

Although it is a place where the women we support receive advice, it is designed to create a welcoming space that builds trust and strengthens intercultural cooperation. Mutual support and solidarity are core values of our work. As a result, information sessions and events often end with a shared snack, coffee and tea, informal conversations, and plenty of laughter.

Information sessions

In collaboration with Médecins sans frontières:

- Reproductive health
- Personal hygiene
- Protection against sexually transmitted infections
- Violence against women, sexual harassment and exploitation
- Protective measures and women's rights
- Parenting advice and setting boundaries within the family
- Respect, consent and self-empowerment

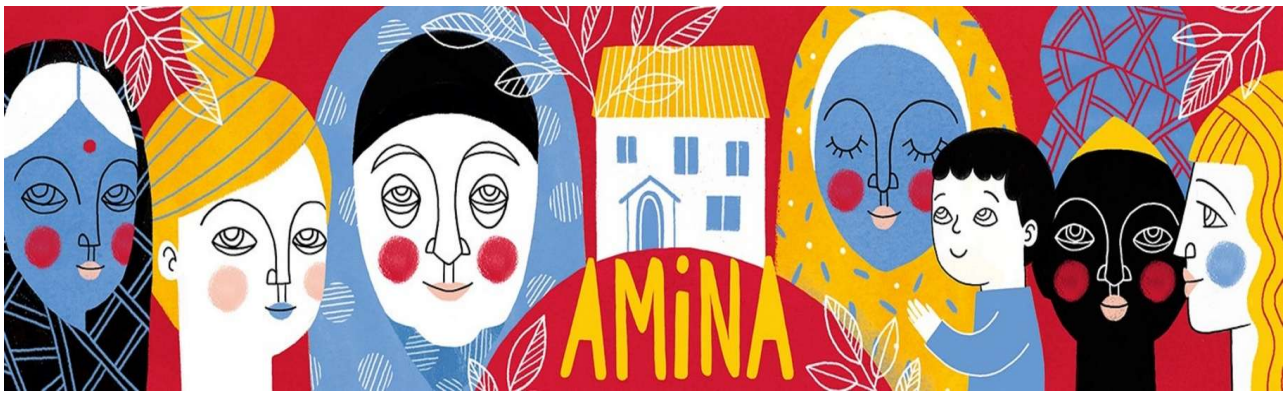
Educational programmes

During the reporting year, 282 hours of in-house educational programmes were delivered:

- Homework support for service users and women attending evening and second-chance schools, as well as for their children
- Discussion groups in English, Greek and French
- Sewing workshops and training sessions on using computers and smartphones
- Various information sessions on literacy, eligibility for language exams under the Common European Framework of Reference, etc.

In collaboration with the refugee education coordinators (Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport)

- informative workshops on access to formal education



8. Amina Centre, Athens

The day centre opened in central Athens in 2018 and has supported nearly 1,000 displaced women to date. The women who come to our centre are not merely clients; we regard them as part of the Amina community. Our staff take the time needed to tackle complex problems and lay the foundations for growth and autonomy.

It takes experienced staff to help our clients – in a language they understand – to navigate the maze of bureaucratic procedures and find their way towards self-reliance. This cannot be achieved in a matter of months; it often takes years. Nor is there a one-size-fits-all approach – every case has its own complexities, ranging from registering and enrolling children in school, through accessing urgent medical care, to finding a job.

We aim to empower our clients whilst fostering a community in which everyone supports one another – a goal we are achieving more effectively with each passing year.

Through regular visits, the women are able to build relationships and friendships. We place great importance on creating an environment in which women feel comfortable and can express themselves freely. Based on their feedback, our team continually adapts the programmes to respond to changing needs.

8.1 Local circumstances

In 2025, state accommodation programmes were discontinued, and financial support for asylum seekers was provided only sporadically, with prolonged interruptions leaving those affected without any income whatsoever. These developments exacerbated the precarious situation of the women who moved on from Lesbos to Athens, as the lack of housing support and the collapse of financial support systems make even basic stability impossible.

Athens is big, impersonal and expensive – and yet it is the place where many hope to gain independence gradually. It is a hope that we share with our clients. Beyond the warm welcome, the safe environment, and the partial provision of their basic needs, the women know they will work with professionals who will walk every step of the way with them, without giving up.

8.2 Services at the Amina Centre

The Amina Centre is run by a team of dedicated female professionals who provide services and programmes in Arabic, English, French, Farsi and Greek, with a focus on promoting inclusion and skills development. More than 70 per cent of the women we currently support have accommodation in the city and have been using our centre's services for an average of three years.

Information sessions and activities

In collaboration with Medical Solidarity International

- Activities for babies, toddlers and mothers, as well as parenting advice

In collaboration with the 'Athena Health' Centre of the City of Athens

- Seminars on bullying / building self-esteem in adults and children / Setting boundaries within the family

In collaboration with 'Alma Zois'

- Breast cancer information session

Additional in-house services

- 440 hours of group sessions and regular activities providing psychosocial support
- First-aid training in April, led by a nurse and certified trainer with practical exercises
- Discussion in June to mark *Pride Month* on discrimination against LGBTQI people and the importance of inclusion
- International summer language programme for children during the summer holidays, featuring creative activities and a visit to a museum
- Upcycling activity in August to redesign UNHCR-labelled school bags.
- Excursions and cultural activities (museum visits, etc.)
- Celebrations to mark specific occasions (International Women's Day, end-of-year party, etc.)



8.3 Informal Greek language programme



For several years, the Amina Centre has run an informal Greek language programme. In 2025, an average of 33 women took part; over the course of the year, some dropped out while new participants joined. The programme provided 772 teaching hours.

- Four participants successfully passed exams at levels A1 and A2, as well as the exams required for Greek citizenship.
- SAO covered the fees for the exams based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.
- The programme is needs-based and adapts to the participants' language skills, ranging from absolute beginners – including illiterate women – to preparatory courses for official exams.
- According to feedback, the participants are satisfied with the lessons but find it difficult to achieve their learning goals, as they are generally unable to devote more than two hours a week to learning Greek due to care responsibilities, long working hours and health problems.

8.4 Language skills and bureaucratic barriers

It is highly unlikely that a woman would start learning Greek if she does not have a roof over her head. However, to rent a flat in Athens, one needs an income, support in overcoming landlords' scepticism towards refugees, a range of documents, and a bank account.

To open a bank account, you need a valid residence permit (a process characterised by delays and conflicting statements from various authorities) as well as a tax number.

Each requirement depends on another. Even if all the documents are in order, there is no guarantee that legal employment can be found and taken up, which is essential for accessing social benefits.

Experienced staff are needed to help women navigate a maze of bureaucratic procedures in a foreign language and to guide them through the stages leading to greater independence. Learning Greek is crucial to achieving this independence, as it enables women to access vital services and pursue their goals with greater autonomy. In response, SAO has expanded its Greek language programme, in which our clients in Athens are actively participating.

9. Partnerships in Greece

At both locations, SAO works closely with grassroots organisations, medium-sized and large organisations and institutions (local authorities, the Ministry of Education, asylum authorities and international humanitarian organisations). Maintaining close cooperation and coordination with organisations and institutions is essential to expanding the support available to the women in our care.

On Lesbos, in 2025 we worked with:

- Boat Refugee Foundation
- Caritas Hellas, Lesvos Social Centre
- Centre for the Integration of Migrants for the Municipality of Mytilene
- Coordinators for the education of refugees at the Ministry of Education
- Doctors of the World
- Médecins Sans Frontières
- Metadrasi
- Refugee Education and Learning
- Sisters of the North

As in previous years, we once again received generous in-kind donations from members of our local community in Mytilini, who wholeheartedly support the Bashira Centre and its mission.

In Athens, we worked with the following organisations in 2025:

- Alma Zois
- Athens Coordination Centre for Migrants and Refugees Issues (ACCMR) of the Municipality of Athens
- Attica Human Support
- Centre for the Prevention of Addiction and the Promotion of Psychosocial Health "Athina Health" of the Municipality of Athens
- Christian Refugee Relief (CRR)
- EmpowerVan
- Medical Solidarity International
- One Child – One World
- Parents and Teachers' Support Association of St Catherine's School
- Project Armonia
- Safe Place Greece
- Sistech Greece
- UNHCR
- We need books

We sincerely thank all the organisations and institutions for their constructive cooperation. We would also like to thank the individual donors who, as they do every year, have generously supported our work with in-kind donations.

SAO in Switzerland

1. Major financial challenge

In 2025, we continued to work intensively to find additional funding sources to replace the government grants (SEM) that had been withdrawn since 2024 and had covered 20 per cent of our annual budget. At the same time, the entire humanitarian sector is suffering from massive cuts to US-AID funding, and we have had to accept several rejections from foundations whose funding is now, for this reason, concentrated on the 17 poorest countries in the world. To make matters worse, the refugee situation in Greece continues to be out of the media spotlight due to other geopolitical issues (Ukraine/Gaza), and private donations have consequently declined.

Consequently, we have unfortunately had to take out another loan of CHF 50,000 and implement various painful cuts. Two posts in Greece were not refilled after staff departures, and in Zurich we continue to rely on Eva Hammesfahr's generous offer to take on the role of managing director voluntarily.

Overall, a comparison of all cash inflows and outflows shows a decrease in cash and cash equivalents of CHF 20,911.79. This means that more funds flowed out than flowed in during the reporting year.

Due to the negative net result for 2025, the Board was compelled to approve drastic cuts to the 2026 budget. At the same time, fundraising activities are being specifically expanded to target additional markets. These measures aim to reduce existing loans while gradually building financial reserves.

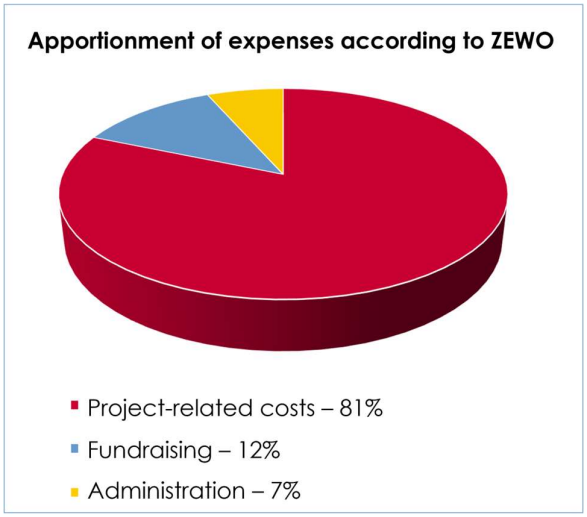
2. Use of financial resources

Under ZEWO[2], the allocation of expenses is based on three key criteria:

- project-related expenditure
- fundraising
- Administration

The high proportion of project-related expenditure underlines the focus on direct project work and the impact-oriented use of available funds.

The low proportion of administrative costs indicates a lean cost structure.



[2] **Zewo** (originally the 'Central Information Office for Charitable Organisations') is an independent Swiss foundation based in Zurich which specialises in the certification of non-profit organisations (NPOs) that raise funds.

3. Events

The strained financial situation mentioned above meant that we did not organise any events this year, and the general meeting took place exclusively online.

4. Office

In January, we appointed a new Executive Director, but parted ways with her during her probationary period. Our views on corporate culture and staff management were too far apart.

Zoé Roth continues to be responsible for foundation fundraising at 60%. Even in this challenging year, she has been a particularly great support to us: not only has she successfully managed foundation fundraising, but she has also provided crucial support during periods of staff changes through her in-house knowledge, excellent written communication skills, and abilities as our 'research queen'. Also remaining on the team are **Sarah Zbinden** (working 10% of full-time hours, social media) and **Simon Herzog** (working 40% of full-time hours, bookkeeping and administration).

5. Board of Directors

Volunteering on the board of an NGO means making a binding commitment to the mission, taking on leadership roles and responsibility for the organisation, and establishing reliable processes. This is especially true for a programme operating in a volatile, challenging environment and facing increasingly limited resources. Every fundraising opportunity must be seized, and the organisation must be managed so it can fulfil its purpose effectively without overburdening people or resources.

During the reporting year, it became apparent that the Executive Board's existing structures and expertise could only partially meet the increased demands of this increasingly challenging environment. Against this backdrop, the organisation initiated a renewal process, culminating in the appointment of new members to the Executive Board.

With its newly constituted Board, the organisation now has significantly expanded specialist expertise in fundraising, board work, and strategy, enabling it to address current challenges effectively and with foresight. We are committed to expanding the Board in a targeted and careful manner, including members who identify with SAO's mission and programme and are committed to supporting them with sustained dedication.

With great gratitude and deep appreciation, we bid farewell to our long-serving board member, **Claudia Colic**, who has had a significant influence on our organisation over the past eight years. Her outstanding financial expertise has been of immense value to our work. Her broad experience in dealing with different cultures was particularly enriching. This perspective was evident in the respectful dialogue she maintained with our field staff. She treated them as equals, thereby strengthening trust and cooperation within our organisation in the long term. We want to thank Claudia warmly for her commitment to our mission. We wish her all the very best for the future.

We also wish the other former board members – Annick Girardier (who continues to support us as a loyal volunteer), Antje Heimhalt and Philine Zimmerli – all the best.

6. Supporters

Companies and institutions 2025

Last year, SAO received financial support from the following foundations and funding bodies:

Accordeos Foundation
Anne Frank Fund
Business & Professional Women Baden
Caritatis Foundation
De Clivo Foundation
Dr Ernst-Günther Bröder Foundation
Municipality of Baar
Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of St Gallen
Evangelical Reformed Parish of Münchwilen-Eschlikon
Evangelical Reformed Parish of Trogen
Evangelical Reformed Parish of Uitikon
Evangelical Reformed Parish of Zurich, District 11
Fagus lucida Foundation
FAIRster Foundation
Fivetolife Foundation
Alfred & Eugénie Baur Foundation
Smartpeace Foundation
Karl Mayer Foundation
Flüelen Catholic Parish
Mother Bernarda Foundation
Reformed Church of the Canton of Zug
Bözberg-Mönthal Reformed Parish
Reformed Church of Rued
Reformed Parish of Tablat in St. Gallen
Roger Haus Foundation
Rotary Club Aegeri-Menzingen
Rotary Club Entlebuch
Rotary Club of Upper Lake Zurich
Rotary Club Solothurn
Rotary Club Üetliberg
Sauerteig Fund
Basel Solidarity Fund
Town of Wetzikon
Stefanie and Wolfgang Baumann Foundation
Dr Valentin Malamoud Foundation
Focus on Women Foundation
Fons Margarita Foundation
Swisslos Fund of the Canton of Solothurn

Companies

Bühler & Bühler, Zurich
Die Pfeife, Grüningen
Chiway Therapy Centre, Winterthur
Klingler Immobilien GmbH, Glattfelden
Lenhard Organisationsberatung GmbH, Zurich
Masmaa, Zurich (formerly Welcome to School)
Oliven & Oel, Maja and Ümit Altintas, Zurich
Pratohaus AG, Zurich
RBDE Digital Engineering, Zurich
Refinitiv SA, Zurich
Rubi Group, Zurich
Interkult Association, Lausen
Yogafeuer, Winterthur

Private fundraising initiatives

Heidi Frischknecht

Donations in kind

Bamboo Basics, DLD Trading AG, Hess Natur

7. Acknowledgements

Given that many organisations active in Greece since the peak of the refugee crisis in 2016 were forced to cease operations in 2025, we particularly appreciate the ongoing support for SAO.

We want to express our heartfelt thanks to the many private donors whose long-standing commitment underpins and strengthens our work for women fleeing their homes. This reliable support is invaluable to us and fills us with gratitude.

We also rely on funding from foundations, church parishes, service clubs, and other institutions. Once again, professional funding applications, consistent adherence to deadlines, careful reporting on the use of funds, a transparent public annual report, and financial reporting in accordance with GAAP FER 21 are key to our success.

8. Concluding Remarks

2025 proved to be a year of considerable financial, organisational and political challenges. Thanks to ongoing donations, we were able to continue our core work and make a significant, positive difference in the lives of many women. Your support has enabled us to carry on our work in a targeted manner and to provide urgently needed assistance.

The need remains as high as ever. At the same time, with a new, motivated and committed board, we remain committed to providing reliable support and helping to shape sustainable change in the future.

Our support for one of the most vulnerable groups is essential. This makes your solidarity all the more important in the coming year. Every contribution makes a tangible difference in continuing our work. Together, we can create opportunities and build a more sustainable future for women forced to flee. We thank you warmly for your trust and support.

Zurich, March 2026 rh/tl



Raquel Herzog, together with the teams in Switzerland and Greece

Founder / Representative

Working for SAO in 2025

Board

Claudia Colic	until May 2025
Antje Heimhalt	until September 2025
Annick Girardier	until May 2025 / remaining as a volunteer
Philine Zimmerli	until May 2025
Raquel Herzog	remaining
Michèle Sauvain	remaining
Anabel Wörner	newly elected since June 2025
Mike Helbling	newly elected since June 2025

Executive Board

Eva Hammesfahr	Managing Director (volunteer)

Office

Zoé Roth	Fundraising
Sarah Zbinden	Social Media
Simon Herzog	Accounts / Administration

Greece

Tereza Lyssiotis	CEO Greece
Anna Botsoglou	Communications Manager, Greece

Bashira Centre

Anna Pavlidi	Programme Manager
Ifigenia Kostourou	Social Care Assistant
Anita Yousaf	Activities Coordinator / Teacher
Asmaa al Jumaly	Arabic Translator
Shirin Shojaei	Farsi Translator

Amina Centre

Aloisia Makrionitou	Junior Programme Manager
Emmanuela Anagnostopoulou	Psychologist / Activities Coordinator
Christina Koumantataki	Social Worker
Eleni Manou	Greek Teacher
Fouzieh Kouzehpour	Farsi/Arabic Translator
Malika Benboudjelthia	French Translator
Fatima al Hajj	Arabic Translator