

# ANNUAL REPORT

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AUGUST 2022 - JULY 2023

*off* university

## FIVE YEARS OF OFF

# Where We Come From, Where We Stand

Off University came into being as a response to an emergency: In 2015/2016, thousands of Turkish academics signed a declaration demanding the end of bombardments and human rights abuses by the Turkish army in Kurdish populated areas, and the resumption of the peace process in the region. Most of the signatories were summarily dismissed from their positions, banned from employment in public service, put on trial. Many ended up in exile. Off University was set up by and for them.

At the same time, Off University is rooted in a vision of a university that is different from what exists in Europe or Turkey: A university that takes responsibility for peace and human rights, that is egalitarian in its structure and democratic in its decision-making, that is free of charge for students and open to everyone. Such a university would concentrate on academic work beyond disciplinary borders; eschew participation in oligopolistic publication set-ups and rejects funding by military stakeholders. It would adhere to the highest standards of quality in research and teaching, and a code of conduct that creates safe spaces for free debate.

We may still be far from this vision. But it has spurred us on to set up a charitable association with a very light-touch and open structure of decision making. Long before Covid, we began offering online courses accredited by (predominantly) German universities led by scholars at risk. We are a pioneer in distance learning pedagogies. Our bespoke platform is a safe space.

At-risk scholars are paid to continue teaching while course participation is free and open to all from anywhere in the world. Many courses are co-taught in a trans-disciplinary manner; our programme balances academic and activist approaches, experts and newcomers.

From our beginnings as an organisation supporting scholars from Turkey, we've expanded to work with 200 academics from 14 countries, including Syria, Ukraine and Afghanistan. We've hosted 7 fellows, including artists and human rights lawyers; run close to 70 courses for over 4,000 participants; run 5 research projects, some with major university partners and international initiatives like the New University in Exile Consortium. We focus on gender studies, critical peace studies and rethinking the university.

In all this, we've maintained our own agency, staid true to our aims in the work we do. We've learned a lot and have a wide network of partners. We've gained recognition and respect. These are no small achievements in an environment of academic precariousness, short-termism, diminishing funds and increasing difficulties for critical scholarship. But there is much to be done still.

Off University seeks new strategies to uphold and sustain academic life and knowledge threatened by anti-democratic and authoritarian regimes, aimed at academics from all over the world; academics who have been purged from their institutions, forced to resign, legally and politically persecuted and even imprisoned because of their opinions and research.

Since 2017, we have offered **70** online and hybrid courses, provided financial relief and opportunities for teaching and research for **207** threatened scholars from **14** countries, and collaborated with many German universities and NGOs, forming a virtual network.

Our long-term vision is the creation of a **Peace University** that combines in-class and digital educational settings.

COURSES



12

PARTICIPANTS



889

INSTRUCTORS



59

FELLOWS



6

PUBLICATIONS



54

**EMPOWERING MINDS BEYOND BORDERS!**

**OFF UNIVERSITY IS COMMITTED TO**

**GLOBAL PEACE and**

**A DEMOCRATIC ACADEMIA**

# Courses

Course Name	Instructors	Participants	Partners
Modern Historical Research on the History of Ukraine	15 Scholars	120	Akademisches Netzwerk Osteuropa (AKNO) and Potsdam University
Rethinking War, the Military, and Gender Through the Russian War on Ukraine	12 Scholars	104	AKNO and LMU Munich
Law in a Lawless State - Features of Russia	14 Scholars	125	AKNO and Humboldt University Berlin
Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow	6 Scholars	100	AKNO and Humboldt University Berlin
Contemporary Filmmaking in Exile	Nagehan Uskan	66	Humboldt University Berlin
Taşlar, Kayalar, Harabeler : Geçmişle Yüzleşmenin Hayalet Varlıkları	Meral Akbaş Özge Kelekçi	60	Rosa Luxemburg Foundation
Yavaş Şiddet ve Yavaş Umut: Artist Denemeler	Murat Yavuz	38	Threatened Scholars' Integration Initiative (TSI) and LMU Munich
Patriarchy, Orientalism, Modernisation	Bülent Somay	130	TSI and Potsdam University

2022 WINTER SEMESTER



*Both the quantity and quality of lectures provided an in-depth perspective, specifically within the Ukraine, but contextualised by broader issues of gender, war and conflict.*

Participant, *Rethinking War, the Military, and Gender Through the Russian War on Ukraine*

Course Name	Instructors	Participants	Partners
Gastro-Politics and the City	Nevra Akdemir	18	Threatened Scholars' Integration Initiative (TSI) and Osnabrück University
Çevresel ve Sosyal Sürdürülebilirlik İçin Modada Küçülme	Murat Yavuz	7	TSI and LMU Munich
Feminist and Cross-Cultural Readings of Women's Arts and Literature	Iman Al-Ghafari	64	TSI and Potsdam University
The Arab Spring: Its Makings, Transitions and Political Art in Perspective	Hassan Almohammed	57	New University in Exile Consortium and Marburg University

2023 SUMMER SEMESTER

*I cannot thank Off University enough. You saved me just on time when I was losing hope during a run of bad luck and turmoil. The programme kept me on track and reminded me of what human kindness and solidarity can always do, week after week, day after day.*

Participant, *Feminist and Cross-Cultural Readings of Women's Arts and Literature*



# Collaborations



**AKADEMISCHE NETZWERK OSTEUROPA e.V. (AKNO)**  
We started a collaboration with this network to support scholars at risk from Eastern Europe, hosting four online courses with scholars from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus in the 2022 Winter Semester.



## BEYOND SOCIAL COHESION: GLOBAL REPERTOIRES OF LIVING TOGETHER - REPLITO

Off University is a central non-university project partner in RePLITO, which is funded via the Berlin University Alliance. As part of the project, we have developed a digital archive that fosters research and scientific collaboration with tools of collaborative writing and publishing.

## NEW UNIVERSITY IN EXILE CONSORTIUM

The New University in Exile Consortium at the New School in New York is a worldwide network of universities committed to host endangered scholars, which has been an important partner and supporter. Together we have organized dozens of online seminars taught in tandem by two Consortium scholars in tandem and hosted at our partner universities in Europe. In 2022, the NUIEC co-sponsored two online courses.



## ELISABETH-SELBERT-INITIATIVE

The Martin-Roth Initiative (MRI) and Elisabeth-Selbert-Initiative (ESI) brings host institutions and threatened individuals together for a temporary relocation. While MRI focuses on artists and cultural managers at risk ESI's fellowship is designed for human rights defenders. With their financial support, Through ESI funding, we hosted a human rights defender in 2023 for 6 months in Berlin and our MRI fellow was with us until March 2023.



## INSAF INDIA

International Solidarity for Academic Freedom in India (InSAF India) is a diverse group of diasporic Indians located in different parts of the world. InSAF India aims to highlight the increasing assaults on academic freedom in India, in particular the attacks on anti-caste academics and scholars from minority backgrounds. We organised a number of webinars on academic freedom with InSAF.



## OPEN SOCIETY UNIVERSITY NETWORK

Two at-risk scholars from our network participated in the collective syllabus creation of the *Transnational Feminism, Solidarity and Social Justice* network course. In this collaboration students and faculty from these institutions engage in rigorous academic work, inspire each other through artistic practice, and work closely with local and international initiatives to further the feminist agenda for social justice.

## ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG

RLS funds our ongoing Critical Peace Studies in Turkey project. In 2022-23, we organized an online lab on the non-human aspects of War and established a podcast and a blog series on the Gendered Aspects of War and Peace



## THREATENED SCHOLARS INTEGRATION INITIATIVE

Off-University acted as one of the host institutions for scholars of the Threatened Scholars' Integration Initiative (TSI) by the Open Society University Network. They support scholars who lost their academic positions or could not remain in their home countries. In 2022/23 we offered two residential and three non-residential fellowships.





*The residency has provided me with an excellent opportunity to rest and pursue my interests. The Off University team assisted me at every stage, from relocation to planning my time here. It was nice to be in a welcoming environment with people who understand your needs.*

*Off University Fellow*

*Off University started exploring the intersection of arts and academia in 2019 with the Reflection Series. This new direction led us to host a fellow who is active in the arts and culture sector. In collaboration with the Martin-Roth Initiative, Off University is able to invite cultural workers, artists and scholars at risk to Berlin and offer them some time to regain strength, to rest and to think.*

# Visual Storytelling as Resistance

Zahra Gardi participated in the workshop *Visual Storytelling as Resistance* that we organised with **Mozaik** and **RePLITO** on Lesbos Island from 18 to 30 November 2021.

She is a photographer and video-maker now based in Berlin. Her early short films centred on gender inequality and challenges faced by children at risk in her home country of Afghanistan. Between 2018 and 2022, she was part of video collectives *Refocus* and *Kino Wish* on Lesbos Island and in Athens, and produced videos dealing with different aspects of migration. Zahra was also part of the team that produced the *1000 Dreams* photography series, which has been widely published in National Geographic. Here is what she says about her encounter with Off University:



## VISUAL STORYTELLING AS RESISTANCE



LESVOS  
SOLIDARITY



MOSAİK



Berlin University  
Alliance



RePLITO

*- I think it's a good opportunity for people like me who lost their chance to finish their studies because of different reasons like migration, poverty, etc. At least we can update or exchange our ideas and we don't feel hopeless."*

*- I had different experiences with Off University. Especially with the project I escaped to my future in collaboration with RePLITO I had a nice moment when I met my new young friends who trust me and told me about their dreams, hopes and difficult moments. When they told me about their journey and how they separated from their families, it was a very strong moment for me. After this project, I got more reason to fight for preventing war."*

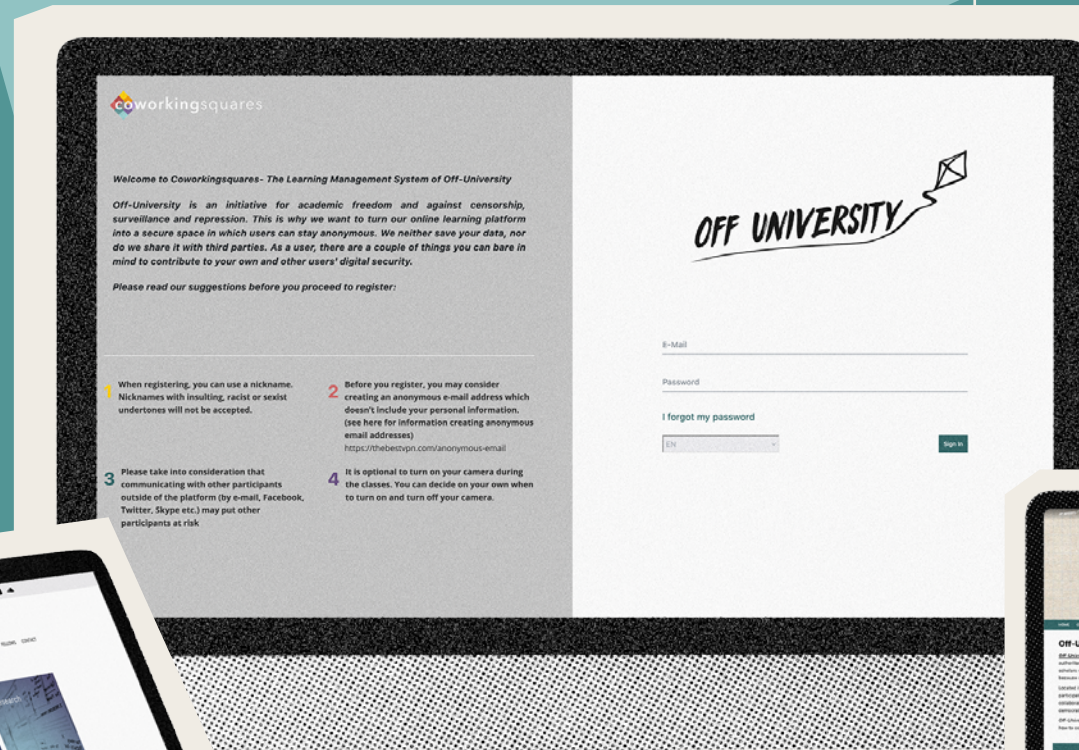
# Digital Space

Revolutionizing Access to Critical Knowledge

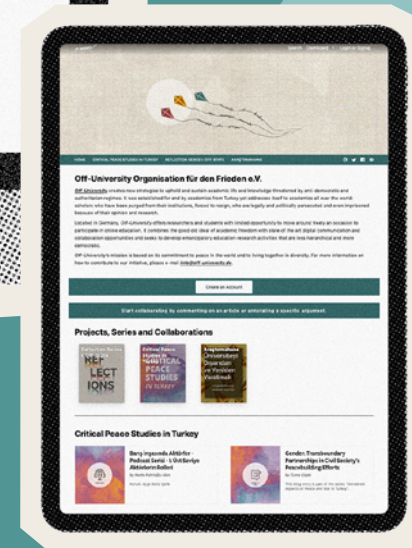
## COWORKINGSQUARES

## REPLITO

We contributed to the development of RePLITO's **digital knowledge archive**, which serves as an infrastructure for its transregional research collaboration and as its open source publication platform.



Coworkingsquares is our own **e-learning platform** that creates **a safe digital space** for knowledge transfer at risk. It enables participants to remain anonymous while allowing for intimate, synchronous formats of online learning.



## OFF.PUBPUB

We established a presence on PubPub, **a collaborative publishing platform** and potential alternative to the monopolized market of academic publishing that usually remains inaccessible for scholars at risk.



## MULTILINGUAL DICTIONARY



Living together in a refugee camp  
Shahram Ahmadi, Mehdi Darif, Nagehan Uskan,  
and Hadis Yakubi



# Multilingual Dictionary

Off University is part of the research collaboration “Beyond Social Cohesion: Global Repertoires of Living Together (RePLITO) that explores practices of coexistence in a consortium of departments at Berlin’s Humboldt University (HU) and Freie University (FU). As a result of the hybrid courses and workshops we did with refugee scholars, artists and activists on Lesbos island, some participants started to collect the words, utterance and speech acts used in the refugee camp on the island. They document both the hardship, but also the strength to resist and to live together despite all the odds experienced by the community of refugees. This resulted in a “Multilingual Dictionary” that was first presented on Mother Tongue Day 2022 at the **Department of Gender and Media Studies of the South Asian Region** at HU Berlin.

As we understood that the words used were partly common in other refugee camps across Europe we launched the dictionary again as a **Wikibooks** to allow for community additions and interaction.

## SELECTED WORDS FROM THE MULTILINGUAL DICTIONARY

### **A** Ali Baba

A story about a man who is like a Robin Hood.

Common in the Arabic world, he's stealing for giving to others.

- In the camp when you lose something, or something is stolen from you, you say it's "Ali Baba". For example, a person goes to the police and says "My telephone is Ali Baba" and the police will understand.
- 

### **C** Çabuk Çabuk

- The expression means "fast fast" and is known by different populations of the camp as they were factory workers in Turkey before coming to Lesbos. This expression was used by bosses in order to make them work faster in Turkey.
- 

### **K** Khalas / Tamam

- "Khalas" in Farsi and "Tamam" in Turkish have the same meaning: "okay", "it's finished".
  - They're mostly used when someone gets positive news after their interview. Examples: "Moria khalas", "Moria tamam".
- 

### **M** Malaka

- One of the most common expressions in the Greek language used at the same time as a form of insult and a way of showing affection.

### **M** My friend

- Inside the camp when you want to say something to someone, it doesn't matter that you know that person or not. You call everybody "my friend".
- 

### **S** Stop Pushbacks

- A slogan used by different communities in the camp and across Lesbos in the last two years.
- Migrants, activists and NGO workers use this slogan to demand that the Greek Coast Guard and Frontex stop pushing people who are looking for a safe space.

# Selections from Our Events



**Academic Freedom in Iran: How Ideology Can Affect Science**

28 JUNE 2023 14-16 UTC

Registration Link: <https://rb.gy/6i971>

Organizers: SCHOLARS AT RISK IN P.E.W.O.A., RePLiTO, C.A.F.A., OFF-UNIVERSITY, PEER NETWORK, RePLiTO, SCHOLARS AT RISK NETWORK.

Scan to Register (Free event via Zoom)



**ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN ASIA 2**

ACADEMICS AT THE FRONTLINES AND CROSSFIRES: LIVED EXPERIENCES AMID THE PROTRACTED DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING IN MYANMAR

15 SEPTEMBER 2023 (FRIDAY)  
21:00-23:00 (GMT +7) | 14:00-16:00 (UTC)

Register Here

**LIVING TOGETHER LOOKING APART**  
International Conference  
28. - 30.9.2022  
Venue: Oyoum (Lucy-Lameck-Str. 32, 12049 Berlin)

Wednesday, 28th September  
**DAY 1: MINORITIES IN PERSPECTIVE**  
14:00 - Welcome  
14:30 - 15:00 - Session A  
Lecture by Hannah Traher (Free Universität Berlin)  
Re-Humanizing the Figure of the Jew, or An Excavation of German Travel Guides to Israel from the 180s to Today  
Represented: Nabeel Samir (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität zu Berlin)

18:00 - 17:00 - Coffee Break  
17:00 - 18:00 - Keynote Lecture  
Lecture by Karel Dvořák (University of Oxford)  
Constitutional Minorities  
Discussed: Schirin Amir-Moazem (Free Universität Berlin)

Thursday, 29th September  
**DAY 2: (RE)IMAGINING DOMINANCE**  
14:00 - 16:00 - Session A  
Panel: Everyday Border Making Practices: Intersections of Migration, Democracy, and Nationalism  
with:  
• Zeynep Bakırbağ (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)  
• Egi Işıl (Goethe Institute of International Affairs) and  
• Selin İleri (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)

18:00 - 17:00 - Coffee Break  
17:00 - 18:00 - Session B  
Roundtable: Aesthetics of Majoritarian Nationalism  
with:  
• Saima Siddique (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)  
• Nadja Christina Schneider (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)

Friday, 30th September  
**DAY 3: ICONOGRAPHIES OF RESISTANCE**  
18:00 - 12:00 Session A  
Panel: Gender and Women in the Kurdish Struggle  
Introduction by Hasan Özalp (Goethe Universität Frankfurt)  
with:  
• Dana Aydin (University of Duisburg-Essen)  
• Neel Arora (Imperial College London / Off-University)

12:00 - 14:00 Lunch Break  
14:00 - 16:00 - Session B  
Roundtable: Storytelling, Re-Writing Histories  
Introduction: Rita-Marie Trömann (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)  
with:  
• Zahra Gadi (Photographer / Filmmaker)  
• Barbara Manzi (Humboldt University Berlin / ARD / Research Grant Program Fellow)  
• Naghan Ukani (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)  
• Juliana Sireva (Free Universität Berlin)

16:00 - 17:00 - Coffee Break  
17:00 - 18:00 - Session C  
Roundtable and Book Presentation: The Image of the protesting woman  
with:  
• Praveen Singh (Photographer, Mumbai) Discussion of Singh's photo book for Shaam Shaheen Bagh  
• Malika Louage (German Historical Institute London)  
• Rita-Marie Trömann (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)

18:00 - 20:00 - Dinner Break  
20:00 - 22:00 - Poetry Reading and Cinema Night  
Featured Poet:  
• Adeline Valente and Angelica Freitas  
Film Screening:  
• Short film by Kira Masak Film Collective  
• "Muharrem en Mouvement" (Witness in Movement) (2020) by Juliana Sireva

Organized by Saima Siddique, Juliana Sireva, Rita-Marie Trömann and Hannah Traher in collaboration with Beyond Social Cohesion: Global Repertoires of Living Together (RePLiTO), funded by Berlin University Alliance (BUA) in collaboration with:

RePLiTO | OFF-UNIVERSITY | Berlin University Alliance

replitoconference2022@gmail.com  
Visit our website for further information:  
<https://livingtogetherlookingapart.aubpub.org/>

Lecture and Conversation Series | Summer Term 2023

**DWELLING TOGETHER**  
URBAN HOUSING, NEIGHBORLINESS AND MULTILocal HOMEMAKING

26.04. Dwelling in New Spaces  
Tuba İnal-Çelik (HU Berlin & Off-University)

03.05. Memory, Housing Architecture and Everyday Life  
Nadja Christina Schneider (HU Berlin & RePLiTO)

10.05. Film screening: Kameda - a documentary about the architects Shankar and Navrooh Kameda (2021) by TEIPO collective with the two directors, and producers Karishma Rao and Vishwesh Shiva Prasad

17.05. Living Together or Living Separately? Indian University Spaces and their Neighborhoods  
Anna Schneider-Kruger (HU Berlin)

24.05. Homelessness and Homemaking  
Işıl Ayşe Köpçüker (HU Berlin & Off-University)

31.05. Tracing Vignettes of Sri Lanka's Old City Through a Memory Lens  
Arshi Javed (HU Berlin)

07.06. Socio-Spatial Negotiations of the Highly Skilled Indian Migrants  
Dhara Patel (TU Darmstadt)

14.06. Commenting on the Mahalle, The Neighborhood as Urban Commons  
Julia Struz (HU Berlin, RePLiTO & Off-University)

21.06. In the Company of Plants  
Hilalalkan (Leibniz ZMO Berlin)

28.06. Non-Humans and the Postcolonial City  
Veena Harinaran Gawaharal Nehru University Delhi

05.07. Houshamayan Archive and (Digital) Archiving  
Vahid Tahjan (FU Berlin)

12.07. Concluding session with the working group Urban Dwelling

Wednesday, 6.08pm at HU Berlin (in-person)  
room 315 (3rd floor) at IAAW, Invalidenstr. 118

Contact: Prof. Dr. Nadja Christina Schneider  
nadja.christina.schneider@fu-berlin.de  
<https://replito.de/>  
<https://www.fu-berlin.de/de/gesellschaftswissenschaften/iaaw>

RePLiTO | OFF-UNIVERSITY

**FILM SCREENING**

**HAVA, MARYAM, AYESHA (2019)**

A film by: Sahraa Karimi  
Producers: Katayoon Shahabi, Sahraa Karimi  
The first independent Afghan film entirely shot in Kabul with director, actors, and actresses living in Afghanistan.

Film screening followed by Q & A  
with director Sahraa Karimi,  
moderated by Nagehan Uskan

Visit [www.hava.noorpictures.com](http://www.hava.noorpictures.com)  
for further information on the film

Sunday  
13 November 2022  
at 3:00pm

at fsk Kino am Oranienplatz  
Segitzdamm 2, 10969 Berlin

Free Entry

This event is presented by RePLiTO (Beyond Social Cohesion - Global Repertoires of Living Together, www.replito.de) and Off-University (www.off-uni.org).

RePLiTO | OFF-UNIVERSITY

# Off-Festival and March Meeting

25 March, 2023



In this inaugural Off-Festival, 50 participants came together in person at our Berlin office (Engelnest) and virtually via Coworkingsquares. A number of presentations and workshops highlighted the challenges and opportunities of maintaining a thriving and resilient academia amid numerous challenges. The festival started with a presentation by education activist **Shahpoor Enayat**, *Restrictions for Women and Girls at Universities, Education Centers, and Schools in Afghanistan*. **Hadis Yakubi**, **Shahram Ahmadi**, and **Nagehan Uskan** then showcased their *Multilingual Dictionary*.

TSI scholar **Bülent Somay** facilitated a discussion on a chapter of his book *The End of Truth as We Know It - Five Essays on the Demise of Capitalism*. Its focus on reimagining the university amidst the challenges posed by neoliberalism and authoritarian regimes, brought one of our aims into sharp relief.

The festival closed with TSI scholar **Nevra Akdemir**'s thought-provoking *Kitchen Project*.



**UNIVERSITY WITHOUT BORDERS**

**SINIR TANIMAYAN ÜNİVERSİTE**

**UNIVERSITÄT OHNE GRENZEN**



# THANK YOU

TO OUR PARTNERS

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AKNO - Akademisches Netzwerk Osteuropa

ASH: Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit, Gesundheit und Erziehung

Berlin University Alliance - Academic Freedom Network

RePLITO: Beyond Social Cohesion. Global Repertoires of Living Together

Center for Comparative Research on Democracy

Elisabeth Selbert Initiative

Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies

LMU Munich

Martin Roth Initiative

New University in Exile Consortium

Philipps Universität - Marburg

Rosa Luxemburg Foundation

Threatened Scholars' Integration Initiative

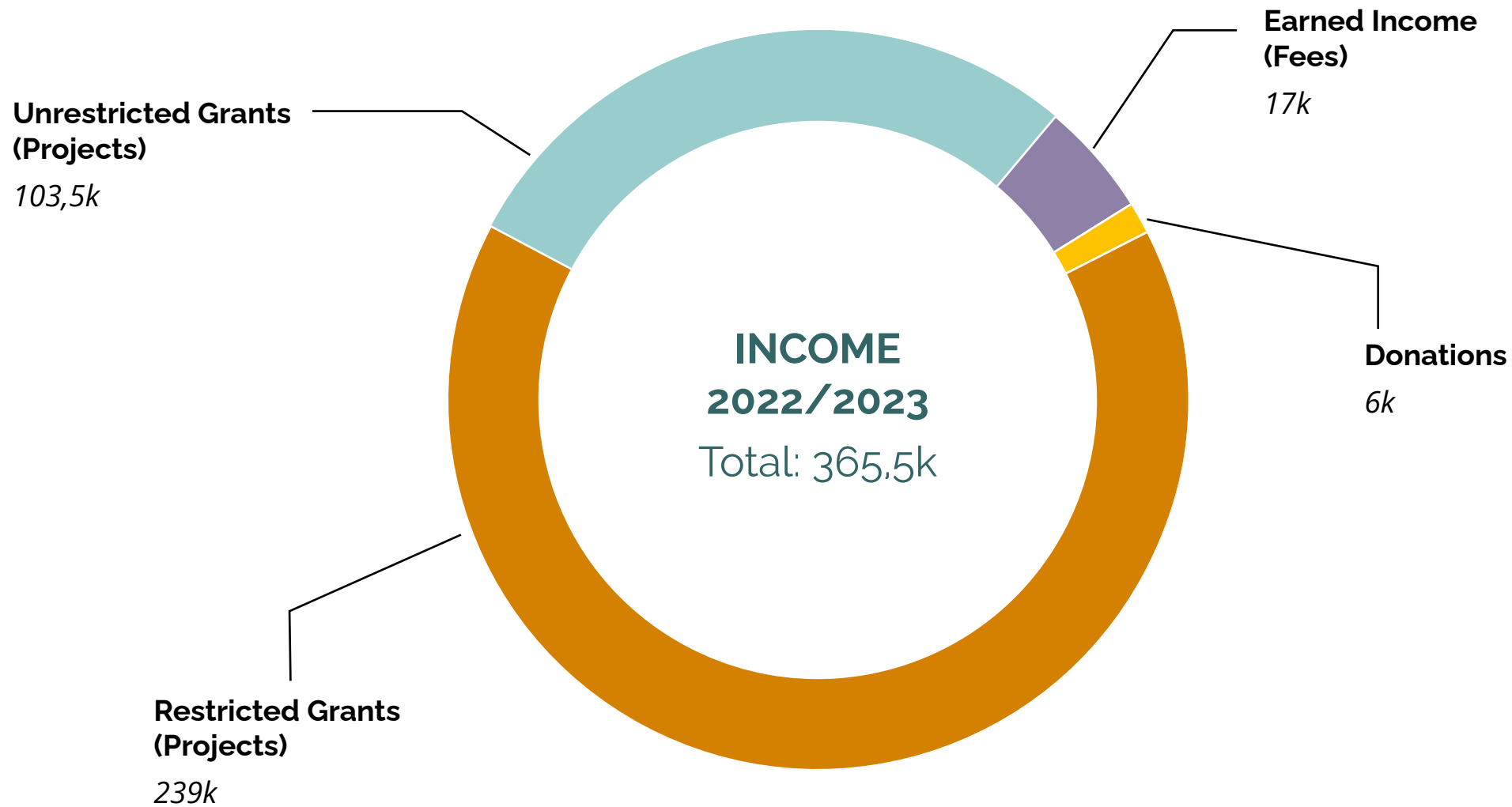
Universität Potsdam

Universität Osnabrück

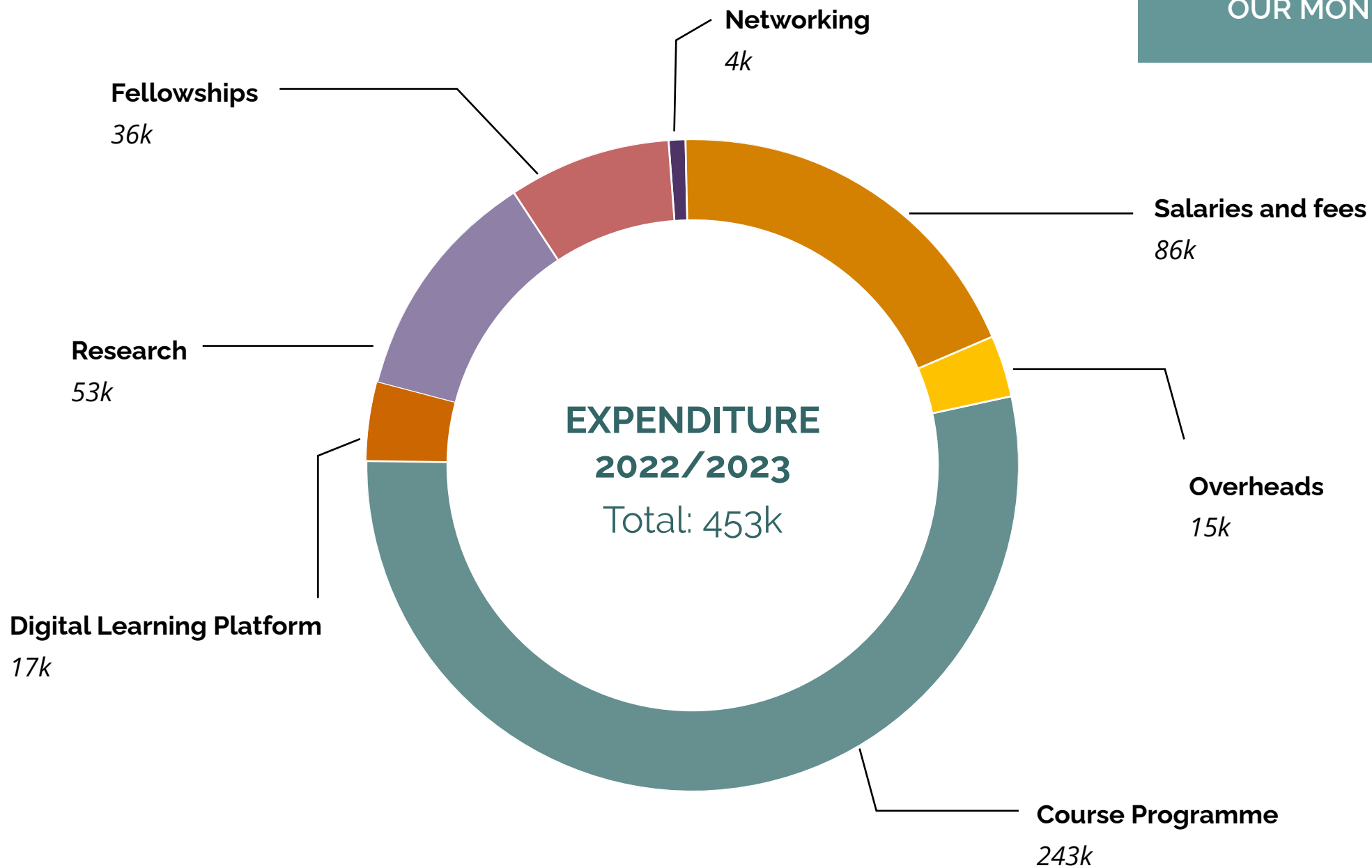
and TO OUR DONORS

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# HOW WE RAISE OUR MONEY



HOW WE SPEND  
OUR MONEY



# OFF-UNIVERSITY TEAM

## BOARD

Official Board



Tuba İnal Çekiç  
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Julia Strutz  
TREASURER



Olga S. Hünler  
CHAIR



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Özlem Albayrak  
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COORD.

Ethics Committee

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Esra Ertan

İrem Akı

Leila Alieva

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Internal Auditors

Anke Schwarz

Gubad Ibadoglu

Volunteers

Asuman Kirlangıç

Christoph Neumann

Hakan Altun



**#freegubad**

On Sunday, July 23, 2023, Gubad Ibadoghlu, our internal auditor at the time, was arrested on counterfeiting charges under Article 204.3.1 of the Azerbaijani Criminal Code. Ibadoghlu, a respected economist and political activist, has been wrongfully detained since his arrest. The charges involve cash that the police allegedly found in his office. Despite his poor health, he was subjected to atrocious conditions during his detention. After 274 days, Gubad Ibadoghlu was moved to house arrest, but is still deprived of his liberty and not allowed to leave Azerbaijan to receive the necessary medical care.

**We call on the Government of Azerbaijan to drop all charges against Gubad Ibadoghlu immediately, to release him and to stop using criminal persecution to intimidate government critics.**

# *off* university

*University without borders* — Sınır tanımayan üniversite — *Universität ohne Grenzen*

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 [info@off-university.de](mailto:info@off-university.de)

 Off-University. Organisation für den Frieden e.V. / Wilhelm-Kabus-Str. 24, 10829 Berlin

