

OFF UNIVERSITY

Annual Report

AUGUST 2023 - JULY 2024

Make Science Not War

Wars profoundly impact on and reshape all spheres of life, including academia. Institutions like Off University, which strive to uphold academic life and preserve knowledge threatened by war-mongering and authoritarian regimes, are particularly sensitive to the effects of war on academic freedom.

Off University recognizes that the relationship between war and academic freedom is complex. Recent wars and military conflicts in Ukraine, and the Gaza Strip have heightened public awareness of human rights violations and the erosion of freedom. They have intensified public and academic debates on these issues and sparked a wave of academic solidarity. By hosting thousands of scholars from war-affected regions, both online and offline, international academic institutions like Off University, networks, and groups amplify the voices and perspectives of local academics and war witnesses, trying to ensure that they are heard by wider audiences and academic communities. This inclusion enriches the space for academic and public debate, fostering a more diverse and complex understanding of ongoing events. Yet, wars also significantly constrict the space for academic freedom, critical thinking, and freedom of speech. Censorship, whether institutional or self-imposed, stifles essential discussions by suppressing dissenting viewpoints and limiting opportunities to publicly express non-mainstream perspectives. Self-imposed censorship is often driven by fear of persecution, which is not merely hypothetical but a reality nowadays. Furthermore, nationalism, which is frequently bolstered by war, puts pressure on scholars to align to nationalistic agendas. This situation prevents open debate and critical inquiry, undermining the very essence of academia, where nationalism should be an object of study, not an epistemological stance.

Wars lead to the displacement of scholars and the interruption of academic careers, causing harm to individuals and weakening international academia. With a clear anti-war agenda, the aim of Off University is to support academics who have lost their homes and academic networks and who have no other way of continuing to teach about the causes of war, how peace can be restored, and how we as a humankind can ever heal the traumas of war.

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 74 online and hybrid courses, provided financial relief and opportunities for teaching and research for 227 threatened scholars from 16 countries, and collaborated with many German universities and NGOs, forming a virtual network.

COURSES



4

PARTICIPANTS



371

INSTRUCTORS



20

FELLOWS



8

PUBLICATIONS



6

RESEARCH PROJECTS



2

Empowering Minds Beyond Borders

OFF UNIVERSITY IS COMMITTED TO GLOBAL PEACE
AND A DEMOCRATIC ACADEMIA



2023 WINTER SEMESTER

Course Name	Instructors	Participants	Partners
How to See the Caste: Hindi Cinema and the Making of Contemporary India	Reyazul Haque	60	Humboldt University Berlin and RePLITO (Beyond Social Cohesion: Global Repertoires of Living Together)
Literature and Social Issues in The Middle East	Shada Bokir Mohammed Almahfali	54	LMU Munich, and The New University in Exile Consortium

2024 SUMMER SEMESTER

Course Name	Instructors	Participants	Partners
Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Toplum (Gender and Society)	14 Scholars from Aramızda: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Araştırmaları Derneği	102	Freie Universität Berlin and Chair of Digital and Audiovisual Media at Bayreuth University
Conflict, Knowledge and Memory: Cases from Palestine and Syria	Ammar Kandeel Mohamad Moustafa Alabsi	155	Freie Universität Berlin and The New University in Exile Consortium



During the Summer semester of 2024, Off University and the New University in Exile Consortium gave me the opportunity to co-lead a seminar on knowledge production, memory, and conflicts in the Middle East. With my awesome partner Dr. Moustafa Alabsi, this was the first time that I was able to translate my research about Palestine into a passionate experience of teaching a heterogeneous public of learners, including master's students, activists, writers, and participants from other professional backgrounds. Their diversity of the public encouraged me to experiment with new teaching methods, based on an interdisciplinary perspective that combines history, philosophy of epistemology, literature, art, and digital humanities. In the tragic context of the genocidal Israeli war in Gaza, I felt the urgent need for proposing a multifaceted glance on the question of knowledge production, examining the historically marginalized Palestinian narrative in the Western sphere as a case study. While the actual context of

Western academia has not been offering an propitious environment conducive for critical thinking about Palestine, Off University provided a safe space for me as a scholar as well as for students with various ideological perspectives, to reflect, in a respectful and rational dialogue on the renewed epistemological challenges of a hundred-year conflict. I believe that this was made possible thanks to the flexibility that I was afforded in conceiving the course syllabus and in implementing a student-centered communicative approach to lessons. Although the classes were conducted online, this type of academic freedom allowed the adaptation of my previous and academic research to engage with the societal need for rational paradigms to make the possibilities of developing a peace-oriented knowledge possible.

Ammar Kandeel

Co-instructor of our course,
Conflict, Knowledge and Memory:
Cases from Palestine and Syria



Collaborations



URGENTLY WANTED: FREEDOM OF RESEARCH AND LEARNING IS A COLLABORATION
is an artistic research project on the barriers to access education and research for New-Berliners that we conduct together with RePLITO in the framework of the Science Year 2024 on "Freedom" funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Science



MARTIN ROTH INITIATIVE
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 cultural sector in collaboration with Martin Roth Initiative. This collaboration allows us to further include at-risk artists and creative practitioners in our work.

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 2023-24, the NUiEC co-sponsored two online courses.



ELISABETH-SELBERT-INITIATIVE
The Elisabeth-Selbert-Initiative (ESI) brings host institutions and threatened individuals together for a temporary relocation. ESI's fellowship is designed for human rights defenders. With their financial support, we hosted a human rights defender in 2023 for 6 months in Berlin.



PHILIP SCHWARTZ INITIATIVE OF THE ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT FOUNDATION
Off University collaborated with PSI fellows to offer online tandem courses with us as part of their scholarship. This collaboration enables at-risk scholars to co-lead a course with a PSI fellow.



BEYOND SOCIAL COHESION: GLOBAL REPERTOIRES OF LIVING TOGETHER - REPLITO
Off University is a central non-university project partner in RePLITO. As part of the project, we have developed an "Digital Knowledge Archive" that fosters research and scientific collaboration with tools of collaborative writing and publishing.

ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG
RLS funds our ongoing Critical Peace Studies in Turkey project. In 2023, we held four roundtables with activists, politicians and scholars to discuss collaboration, voices and the intersectionality of peace. In our 2024 collaboration, we focus on building up a network of academic and non-academic actors for peace in Turkey.



VAHA
(meaning "oasis" in Turkish) is an initiative by Anadolu Kültür and zusa, funded by Stiftung Mercator and the European Cultural Foundation to empower voices of independent arts and culture spaces, advocating for public discussion and dialogue in cities across Turkey, Europe, and their neighbouring countries.



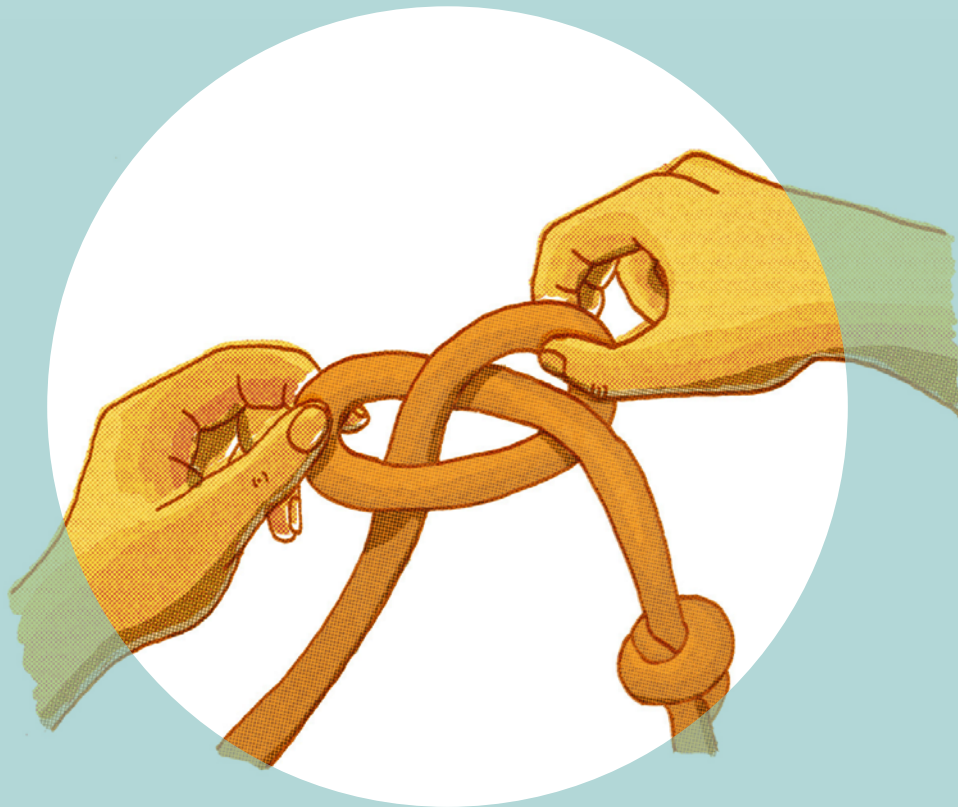


As part of the **VAHA** programme, Off University is joining forces with a hub from Diyarbakır, **Tora Çand û Hûnera Kurdî** (Kurdish Culture and Arts Network) formed by Mesopotamia Foundation, Middle East Cinema Academy Association, and Amed City Theatre. The project aims to empower Kurdish female asylum seekers by amplifying their voices and sharing their journeys with both the Kurdish community in Berlin and their region of origin. Fatma Çelik, our researcher, conducted 8 in-depth interviews to capture their personal experiences and stories. In a collaborative writing workshop, her research will serve as the material for a short documentary film and a theatre play. engaged in a discussion on the challenges to defend peace in Turkey in the current political climate and the opportunities that may arise after the election.

Critical Peace Studies

IN TURKEY

In 2023, we held four roundtable discussions for the Critical Peace Studies in Turkey Project, funded by the Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation. Several activists, researchers, and members of NGOs, unions, and research institutions, political parties, and academics participated in discussions to explore the possibilities of contributing to critical peace studies in Turkey while developing visions for the future.



Voices of Peace underscored the significance of the parliamentary and presidential elections in May 2023 in relation to the concept of peace, and engaged in a discussion on the challenges to defend peace in Turkey in the current political climate and the opportunities that may arise after the election.

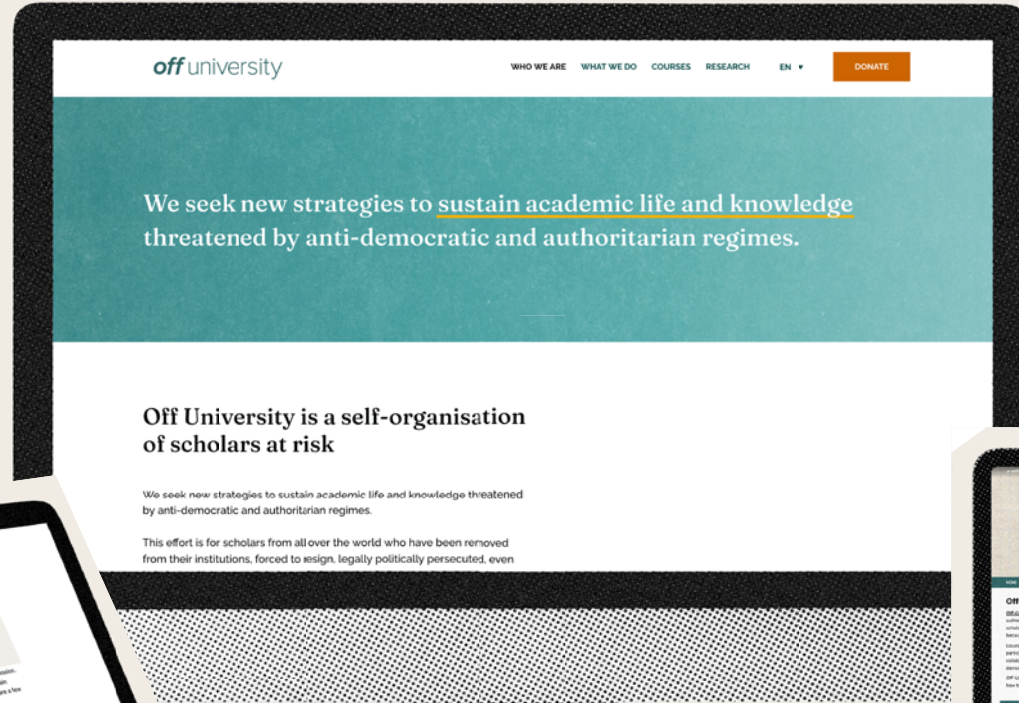
Intersectionality of Peace saw members and activists from political parties and NGOs discussing the concept of peace. The Kurdish LGBTI+ movement took centre stage, with participants not only discussing the activism and peace-building efforts in Kurdish cities but also highlighting the Gezi Park protests as a rupture.

Networks of Peace emphasized once again the importance of an intersectional approach to peacebuilding. Conflicts uniquely affect various groups, including LGBTI+ people, young Kurdish women and disabled people. Participants stressed that to build effective peace, it is essential to consider these diverse experiences. The discussion also highlighted that peace involves not only ending conflicts but also promoting well-being, eliminating inequalities, and achieving social justice.

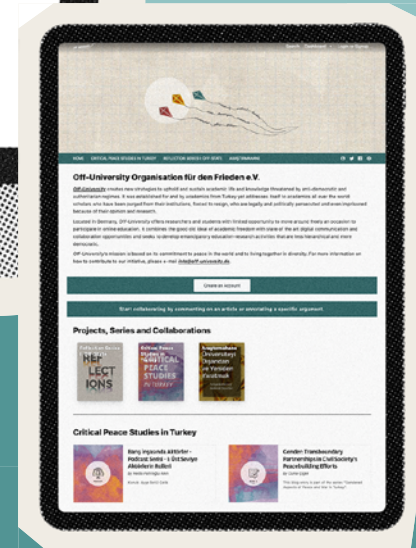
In **Drawing the Path to Peace**, participants discussed what can be done in the current oppressive environment and how to build new peacebuilding strategies for the future. The possible impact of the elections on peacebuilding was discussed thoroughly. The meeting emphasized the need to consider peace in relation to ecology, economy, housing, and the right to health, and that addressing peace through democratization is essential.

MOODLE

We continue to work on creating an online learning environment that is safe for everyone. We are launched our own brand-new **moodle.offuniversity.org**. Starting from 2024 Summer Semester, our online courses and events take place there.



We launched our newly redesigned website on our **new domain**. After meticulous planning and hard work, we unveiled a refreshed look and enhanced features that elevate our users' experience with Off University. Our redesigned website offers a **fresh and modern look**, **improved navigation**, enhanced functionality, flawless device optimization and an overall better user experience.



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.



Scholars at risk, scholars in exile: How can we strengthen and better protect individual freedom of research and teaching?

October 18th, 2023 - Zeit Stiftung, National Library Berlin

Tuba İnal Çekiç represented Off University at this panel discussion. The discussion with international scholars was followed by an exchange among panellists, invited guests, and the audience, highlighting perspectives, experiences, and support mechanisms for persecuted and exiled researchers.



Walking the Tightrope: Freedom of Expression in a Time of Conflict Esra Özyürek and Prof. Irit Dekel

March 5th, 2023


In our pursuit of dialogue, understanding, and renewed connections, we organized a discussion *Walking the Tightrope: Freedom of Expression at a Time of Conflict*. Attended by over 50 scholars, students and activists from around the world, this online exchange featured a conversation led by Prof. Esra Özyürek and Prof. Irit Dekel, exploring the intricacies of freedom of speech in Germany following the Oct 7th Hamas attacks, ensuing armed conflict over Gaza and its global impact. The discussion benefited from their previous collaboration on the article *The Logic of the Fight against Antisemitism in Germany in Three Cultural Shifts* and Esra's recently published book *Subcontractors of Guilt - Holocaust Memory and Muslim Belonging in Postwar Germany*.



International conference: Exiled Scholars and 'Academic Humanitarianism': Conjunctures of Solidarity in Times of Global Crises

May 13th, 2024 - Alice Salomon Hochschule

Ali Yalçın Goymen represented Off University at this conference held at the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences in Berlin, Germany which brought together experts from Germany and abroad to discuss conditions, institutional innovations, and challenges of integrating at-risk and exiled scholars into the academic system. Key topics included reflections on "academic humanitarianism"; the impact of power dynamics on academic discourses and funding structures; and explorations of alternative visions of solidarity aimed at promoting social and epistemic justice in higher education.



**Urgently wanted:
Freedom of
Research and
Learning**


Radio/Video Play Workshops

June, 2024

We participated in Wissenschaftsjahr 2024 (2024 Science Year), focusing on the theme of freedom. Our project, Urgently Wanted: Freedom of Learning and Research, explored the expectations of new Berliners regarding the freedom of education and research. We ran two workshop series for 18-35 year-old newcomers in Berlin to question whether these expectations were being met and examined any discrepancies. Led by Nagehan Uskan and Anouschka Trocker, participants created video projects and radio plays, exploring the meaning of freedom.

Lange Nacht


June 22nd, 2024



Off University participated in the 2024 Science Year, focusing on the theme of freedom. Our project, Urgently Wanted: Freedom of Learning and Research, explored the expectations of new Berliners regarding academic freedom. We questioned whether these expectations were being met and examined any discrepancies. Interested individuals were encouraged to register and learn more by visiting our website. Our research project was presented during the Long Night of Science 2024 at Humboldt University on June 22nd. We set up a booth in front of the main building on Unter den Linden, inviting attendees to engage with us, share their perspectives on Freedom of Learning and Research, and contribute to our ongoing dialogue.

Scholars at Risk Global Conference

June 25-27, 2024 - Vilnius, Lithuania



We attended the 2024 SAR Global Congress, hosted by Scholars at Risk in partnership with the European Humanities University. Themed *Sustainable Knowledge: Lessons from Universities, Scholars, and Students in Exile*, it focused on supporting academic communities displaced by political unrest and conflict. We established new networks, renewed connections with funders, and engaged in discussions on how to effectively assist scholars and students in exile.



THANK YOU

TO OUR PARTNERS

Institute for Asian and African Studies at Humboldt University Berlin

The Institutes for Ottoman Studies and Turcology & Islamic Studies at FU Berlin

RePLITO: Beyond Social Cohesion. Global Repertoires of Living Together

Martin Roth Initiative

Elisabeth-Selbert Initiative

New University in Exile Consortium

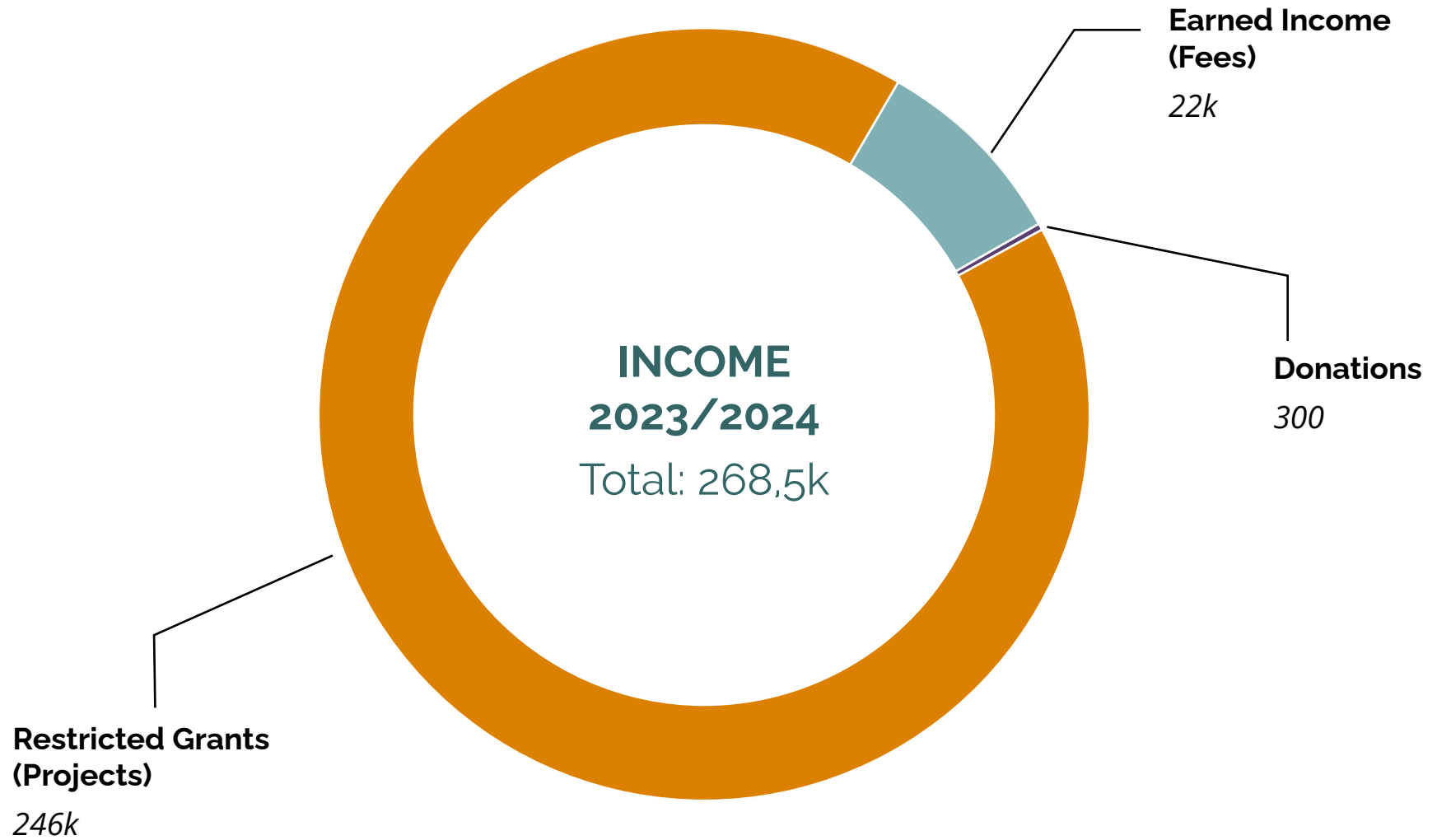
Rosa Luxemburg Foundation

Chair for Digital and Audiovisual Media at Bayreuth University

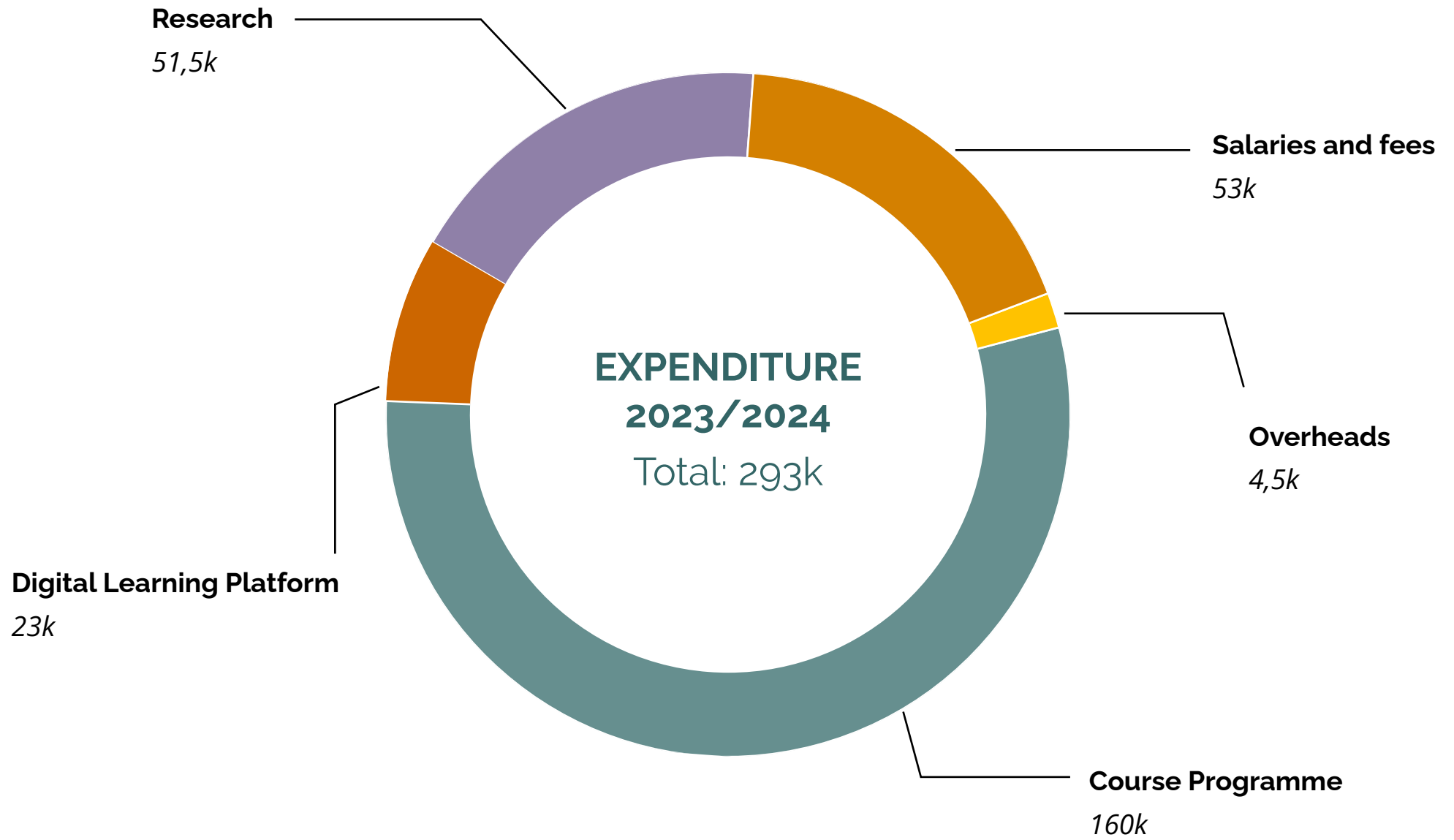
Institute for the Near and Middle East at LMU Munich

and TO OUR DONORS

HOW WE RAISE OUR MONEY



HOW WE SPEND
OUR MONEY



Our Team

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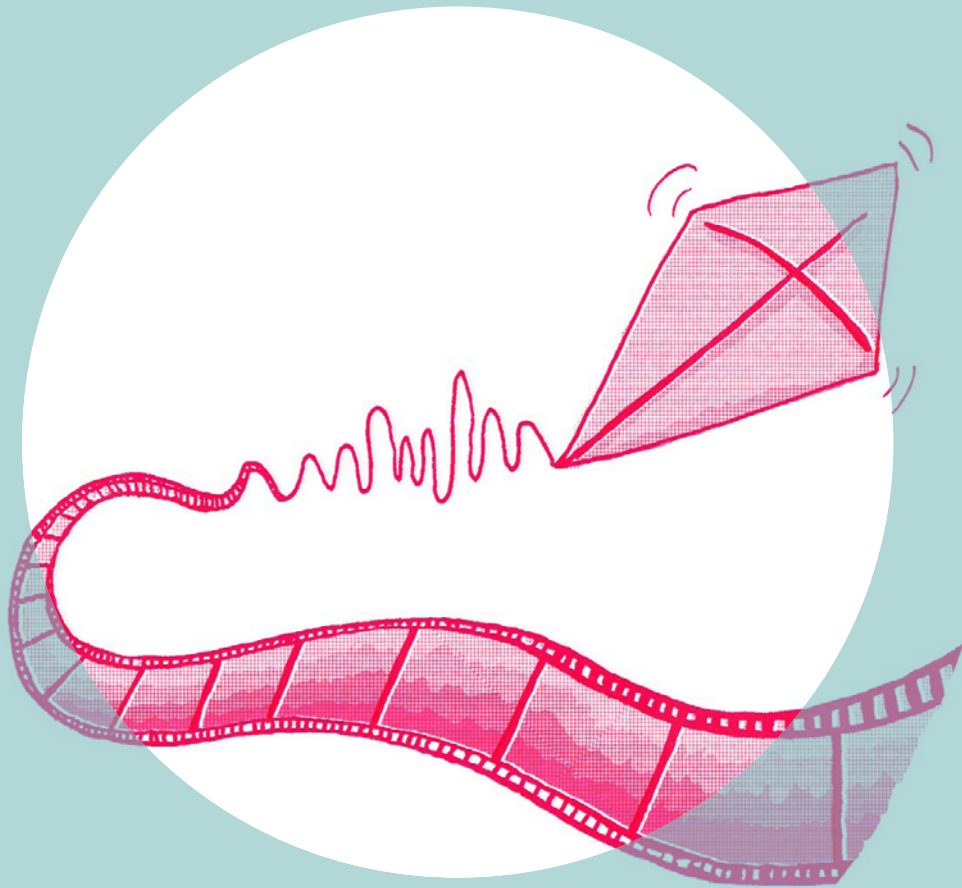
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Urgently Wanted: Freedom of Learning and Research

In our research project *Urgently Wanted: Freedom of Learning and Research*, we explore the expectations and limits of access to university education, professional training, career-building for New-Berliners. Results are documented as a short video and a radio play that you can fully access as from November 2024.

Some recordings from the Radio Play Workshop

I chose not to show my face here and I choose not to show my face in the demonstration because I am afraid of consequences. It's enough to see some of our professors' pictures in the magazine describing them as anti-Semites just because they signed a paper saying "No matter if you are (...) for or against Palestine, but just against the police beating students" (...) That's not wonderful!

At least the university that I know (...) feels like its going to be the solution, like its going to affect the world outside. But I don't see it happening. We go to class and we think about the world and then we discuss and then we produce some papers, but then that's it. We are reading those papers ourselves.



off university

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

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