

JAN.- DEC.
2024

off university

Annual Report

KNOWLEDGE UNDER SIEGE

2024–2025: **Knowledge Under Siege**

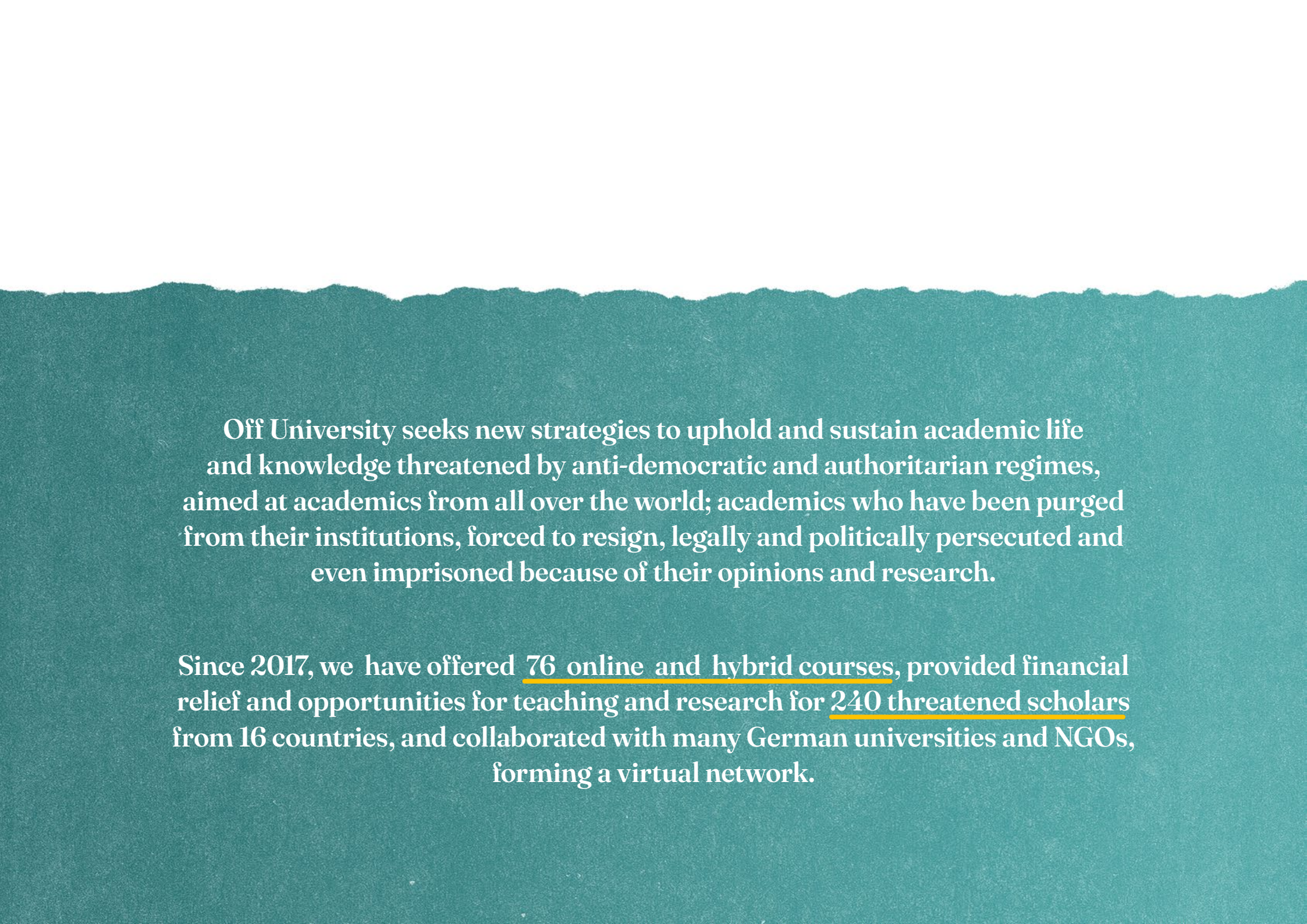
This year, we have witnessed an intensification of global attacks on academic freedom. From the reelection of authoritarian leaders to the escalation of wars and the normalization of far-right discourse, universities are increasingly viewed as battlefields rather than spaces of free inquiry. Institutions, scholars, and students are under pressure to conform, remain silent, or relocate.

At Off University, we witness the consequences of these pressures daily: the exile of critical scholars, the closure of departments, and the shrinking space for dissent. In the United States, entire fields such as gender studies and ethnic studies are facing budget cuts, funding pressures or bans. Equally, in Germany, recent budget cuts have disproportionately impacted the social sciences and humanities, posing a threat to independent research and international collaboration. Universities in cities at war are collapsing.

This year, we continued to focus our work on supporting scholars displaced by war and repression. We achieved this by offering courses and fellowships as well as expanding cross-border collaborations. Despite being vulnerable to political and economic pressures, digital spaces can sustain critical teaching.

The rise of the far right is a crisis of knowledge as well as a political crisis. We are witnessing increasing and emboldened attempts to dictate what can be taught, who can teach, and whose histories are remembered or erased. Off University will continue to resist this narrowing by creating open spaces for critical scholarship, solidarity, and collective learning.

Off University is more than just a project of survival. Even in exile or under siege, it is a commitment to reimagining what the university could be.



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 76 online and hybrid courses, provided financial relief and opportunities for teaching and research for 240 threatened scholars from 16 countries, and collaborated with many German universities and NGOs, forming a virtual network.

COURSES



4

PARTICIPANTS



478

INSTRUCTORS



30

FELLOWS



4

PUBLICATIONS



13

RESEARCH PROJECTS



4

Empowering Minds Beyond Borders

OFF UNIVERSITY IS COMMITTED TO GLOBAL PEACE
AND A DEMOCRATIC ACADEMIA



I gained fresh perspectives on how conflictual narratives have changed overtime and how propaganda plays a role both within one's country and how it differs from international perspectives based on what narrative is shown through the media

Participant,
Conflict, Knowledge and Memory



I'm indebted for the resources, especially for the reading materials. It helped me in having a deeper understanding in memory, and could connect with my Phd thesis chapter.

Participant,
Ways of Remembering

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

2024 WINTER SEMESTER

Course Name	Instructors	Participants	Partners
Navigating the Path to Justice: Legal Framework, Challenges and Strategies for Transitional Justice in Myanmar	Yin Yin Win Nan Kham Mai	69	Humboldt University Berlin and RePLITO (Beyond Social Cohesion: Global Repertoires of Living Together)
Ways of Remembering	Veli Başyigit (in conversation with artists, academics, activists)	152	Bremen University

I had the great opportunity to co-lead the seminar on transitional justice in Myanmar at Off University with Dr Yin Yin Win during the Fall Semester in 2024. The seminar was supported by the New University in Exile Consortium and Humboldt University. It was a profoundly meaningful experience for me as an at-risk scholar. The opportunity to teach in a safe classroom environment managed by the Off University was invaluable, providing a sanctuary where I could share my knowledge and experiences without fear. This space fostered open and honest dialogue, which was crucial for a topic as sensitive as transitional justice. The course brought together a diverse group of students, including both international learners and my fellow Myanmar students.

Engaging with this diverse group was incredibly rewarding. The international students gained a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Myanmar's complex political landscape, moving beyond simplistic narratives. For the Myanmar students, it was a rare and empowering opportunity to critically analyze our own history and envision a different, more just future for our nation. This shared learning experience forged a strong sense of community and solidarity among us.

Ultimately, this teaching experience reaffirmed my purpose as an academic. It demonstrated that even in the face of adversity, my expertise and personal experiences could be a powerful tool for positive change. Being able to contribute to the academic community and inspire the next generation of scholars and advocates has been the most fulfilling part of this journey. It has shown me that our knowledge is not just a profession, but a powerful force for hope and justice.

Nan Kham Mai

Co-instructor of our course,
Transitional Justice in Myanmar



Collaborations



SCIENCE YEAR: FREEDOM

The Year of Science, an initiative by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, focused on the theme of "Freedom" in 2024. In our contribution "Urgently Wanted: Freedom of Research and Learning", we did an artistic investigation on the expectations of New Berliners regarding academic freedom, vocational training and higher education.

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

HU Berlin is a long-standing and key partner, who has hosted 15 online courses to date; we jointly delivered the exploration project RePLITO – Global Repertoires of Living Together, as part of the Berlin University Alliance. In 2024, HU Berlin hosted "Navigating the Path to Justice: Legal Framework, Challenges and Strategies for Transitional Justice in Myanmar" by Yin Yin Win & Nan Kham Ma.



CIRCLE U

CircleU is an alliance of nine research-intensive universities from across Europe. A successful application with HU Berlin and UC Louvain to the Call "CIRCLE U.-COIL – Innovating European Teaching through Collaborative Online International Learning" supported digital security measures for one of our online courses and to hold a workshop on "Collaborative Online Learning: Best Practices" for members of the CircleU

NEW UNIVERSITY IN EXILE CONSORTIUM

is a global network of colleges and universities hosting exiled scholars. To date, we have jointly offered 15 online seminars co-led by a exiled Consortium scholar and a colleague stranded in their country. In 2024 this was "Conflict, Knowledge and Memory: Cases from Palestine and Syria" by Ammar Kandeel & Mohamad Moustafa Alabsi and "Navigating the Path to Justice: Legal Framework, Challenges and Strategies for Transitional Justice in Myanmar" by Yin Yin Win & Nan Kham Ma.



IFA FELLOWSHIPS

The Martin-Roth Initiative (MRI) and Elisabeth-Selbert-Initiative (ESI) bring host institutions and threatened individuals together for temporary relocation. While MRI focuses on artists and cultural managers at risk, ESI's fellowship is designed for human rights defenders. Through ESI funding, we hosted a human rights defender for six month in Berlin. With the support of MRI, we hosted one three-month fellowship in the summer and two longer-term fellows starting in March and in October respectively.



BREMEN UNIVERSITY

Bremen University has hosted six of our online courses to date. In 2024 this was the conversation series, Ways of Remembering: Memories, Representations, Contexts by and with Veli Başyigit.



FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

One of Berlin's public universities, hosted two of our courses in 2024: "Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Toplum" by the association Aramızda and "Conflict, Knowledge and Memory: Cases from Palestine and Syria" by Ammar Kandeel & Mohamad Moustafa Alabsi

ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG

RLS funds our ongoing Critical Peace Studies in Turkey project. In 2024, we held three roundtables with activists, politicians and scholars to discuss local administration and governance practices in the Kurdish Region and their contribution to peace-building processes. We brought together civil society organisations working in the field of peace building, which resulted in the establishment of the Critical Peace Network in early 2025.



VAHA

VAHA is an initiative of Anadolu Kültür and zusa, funded by Stiftung Mercator and the European Cultural Foundation. With their support we collaborated with Mesopotamia Foundation, the Middle East Cinema Academy Association, and Amed City Theatre, on the project "The Journey of Kurdish Women to Berlin".

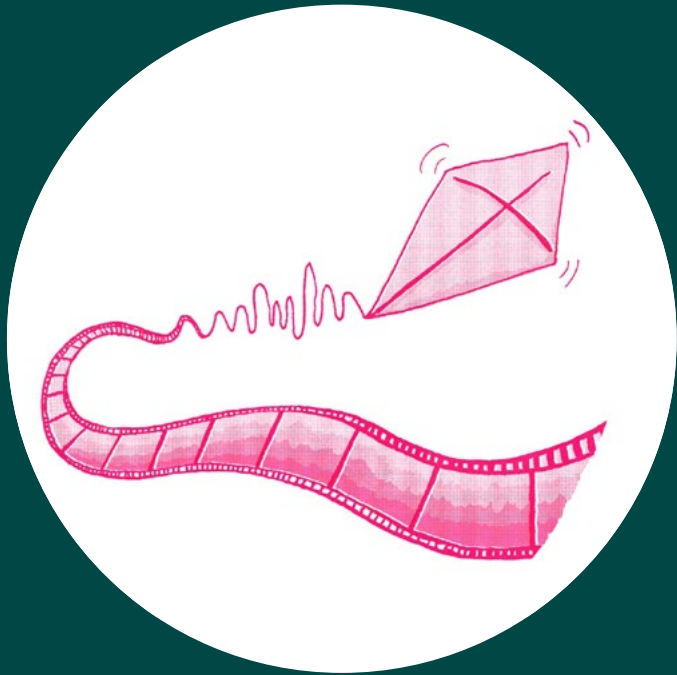


Fellows

ÖVGÜ GÖKÇE

During the summer of 2024, we hosted Övgü Gökçe as a fellow in Mytilene on Lesbos island, together with our local partner, **Siniparxi**. During her two-month fellowship, Övgü had the chance to focus on her activities in a calm and fruitful environment and make a research trip to Athens where she gathered information about cultural heritage and familiarity with film culture in the city and country as a whole. She finalised her relocation by organising the screening “Voicing Voices” (Kulaktan Kulağa / Gotegeteyi) presented 12 short documentaries shot by women from Diyarbakır, Batman and Mardin who share a collective memory and a common experience for the world despite their differences. Övgü and the audience had a great exchange with Turkish and Greek communities based in Mytilene.





Federal Ministry of Education and Research Science Year 2024 – Freedom

The theme of the Science Year 2024 is freedom. This is because it is of fundamental value and is under threat today in ways that have long been unimaginable. The Science Year 2024 is therefore focusing on various dimensions of freedom. What exactly is freedom? Are freedom and democracy connected? Where does freedom begin? With a wide range of opportunities to get involved, the Year of Science provides a framework for intergenerational discussions about freedom, its value and its meaning – with each other and with science. About freedom today, tomorrow and worldwide.

The Year of Science is an initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) together with Wissenschaft im Dialog (WiD).

Urgently Wanted: Freedom of Learning and Research

The value of free research and teaching for society and for each individual becomes particularly clear when this is jeopardized. Political repression in the school and university sector, marginalization, intersectional discrimination, or a lack of choice in education are key reasons for many people to come to Germany, specifically to Berlin. Even today, almost 20 percent of students enrolled in Berlin are new to Germany, and many of them come from countries where academic freedom is under threat.

What do freedom and academic freedom mean to these newcomers? What are their expectations of academic freedom, vocational training and higher education? Are their expectations fulfilled and, if not, why not?

We asked these questions to young and new Berliners. Assisted by filmmaker **Nagehan Uskan** and radio play director **Anouschka Trocker**, they documented their answers and their research process in artistic ways.

New Berliners from Pakistan, Algeria, Turkey and Afghanistan who were already in higher education or preparing to continue their university education in Berlin, took part in our **creative workshops** on either radio or video production. Four days of intensive collaboration included an introduction to audio and video recording techniques, the definition of research questions, the collection of (audio and visual) data, the collective creation of the dramaturgy and finally the editing process of the documentations.

A report contextualizing our collaborative research project within the existing body of research on the topic, and highlighting our learnings and findings is available on **PubPub**.

You can see our Key Findings here

*Urgently wanted: Freedom of Research and Learning is a collaboration of Off University e.V. and the research project **RePLITO (Beyond Social Cohesion: Global Repertoires of Living Together)** at Department of Gender and Media Studies for the South Asian Region (GAMS), Institute for Asian and African Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*

The Situation or the Freedom to be Loud



an Anonymous Request!



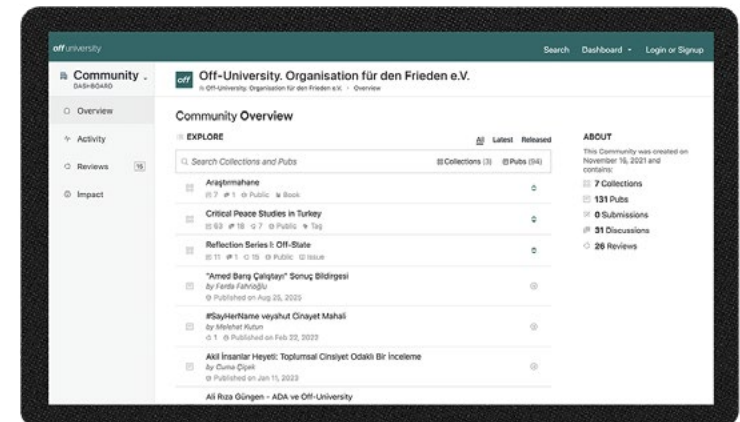
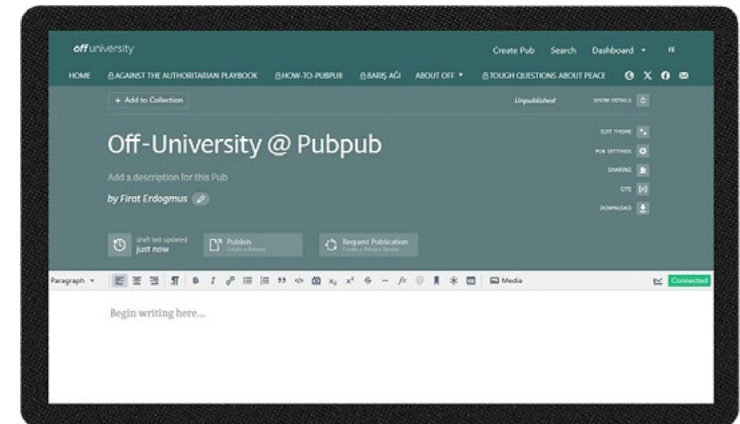
PubPub

AND COLLABORATIVE PUBLISHING

PubPub — a free and open tool for collaborative editing, instant publishing, continuous review, and grassroots journals — resonates strongly with Off University's mission to foster participatory, networked, and experimental approaches to learning, research, and knowledge sharing. This transition empowers our communities to explore innovative formats, collectively shape their publishing workflows, and push the boundaries of what digital academic and educational platforms can achieve.

Off University's hub and **RePLITO's joint platform with Berlin universities** together host 20 collections, 252 pubs, over 56 reviews, and 1,666 discussions. These platforms serve as dynamic, living spaces where participants co-create, debate, and reflect on ideas in real time. From grassroots journals to collaborative research notes, each pub represents a node in a broader ecosystem of knowledge production — an ecosystem that embodies the spirit of experimentation, inclusivity, and dialogue central to Off University and RePLITO alike.

Together, Off University and Replito demonstrate how digital platforms can transform learning and research into decentralized, community-driven practices, where knowledge is not only produced but continuously questioned, reshaped, and reimaged by those who inhabit it.



Critical Peace Studies

Off University engages in “Critical Peace Studies” now in the third year with the support of Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation. In 2024 we have organized three expert roundtables focusing on the role of local government in the peace process of the Kurdish region. Given the constant onslaught on elected leaders that are replaced by government trustees with decrees by the central government of the Turkish nation state, this field proved to be highly contested in the past year.



Within the scope of Critical Peace Studies, we organised and published reports on three online roundtable discussions:

- **Historical Dimensions of Local Governance Practices in the Kurdish Region**
- **Transformative Effects of Local Governance Practices in the Kurdish Region**
- **The Political Legacy of Local Administration Practices in the Kurdish Region and Their Contribution to Peace-building**

With the contribution of scholars, local politicians, decision-makers and activists, we explored different levels of actors involved in peace building processes. These are: the government, parliament, leaders of organisations, which we call decision makers as upper level actors; middle level actors: intellectuals, non-governmental organisations, academics, religious groups; Third level actors are the people affected by the conflict. Local governments, as mid-level actors, have the power to directly influence both high-level and low-level actors. Since they have direct contact with the public, they can make very important contributions to bottom-up peace building processes.

The Journey of Kurdish Women to Germany

(Rêwîtiya Jinên Kurdan bo Almaniyayê)

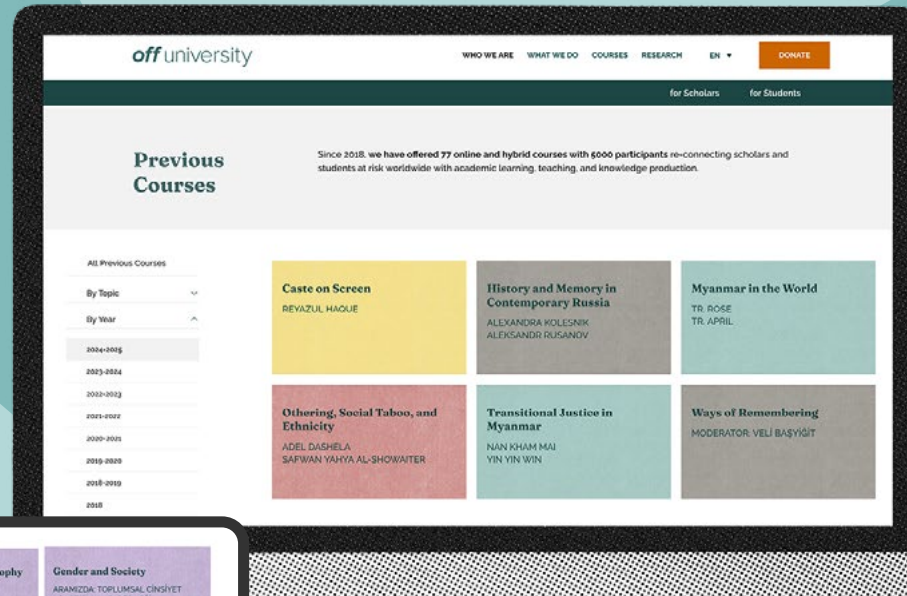


In October 2024, together with partners from Diyarbakır (Mesopotamia Foundation, Middle East Cinema Academy Association, and Amed City Theatre), we organized a focus group with Kurdish refugee women in Germany, creating space to share and connect through their personal stories. This was followed by the online theater workshop Hayattan Kurmacaya (From Life to Fiction), led by *Süreyya Karacabey* and Anina Jendreyko with 30 participants from Diyarbakır and Germany, exploring how lived experiences can be ethically and artistically transformed into performance. The initiative, part of the VAHA programme, laid the foundation for a support network among women and the development of future theater and documentary projects. Read Fatma Çelik's article [here](#).

Previous Courses Archive

offuniversity.org/previous-courses

We launched Off University's
Previous Courses Archive
with more than 70 courses
on our website.



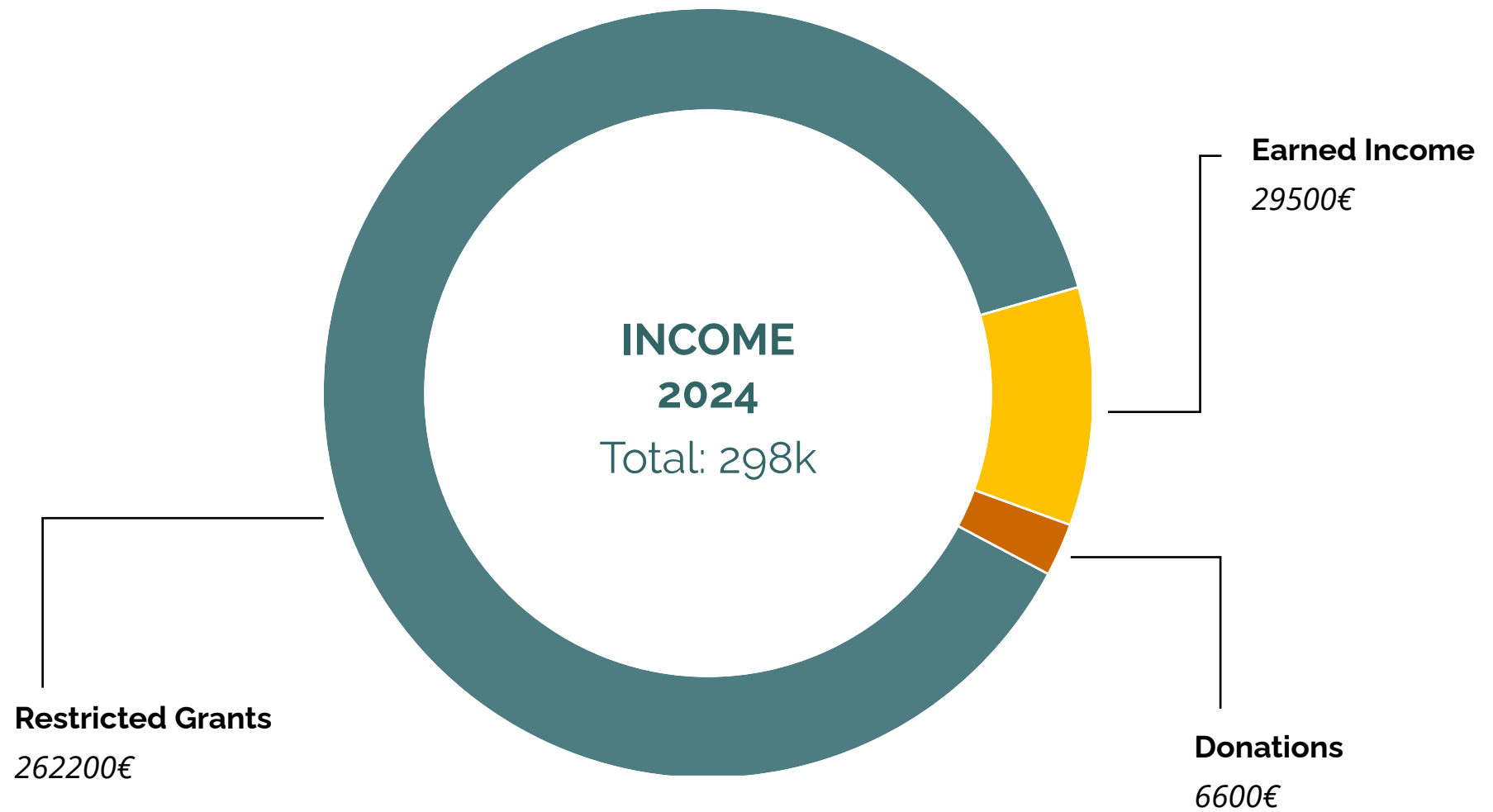
On each previous course
page, you can find
the course overview
and see/download the
course syllabus.

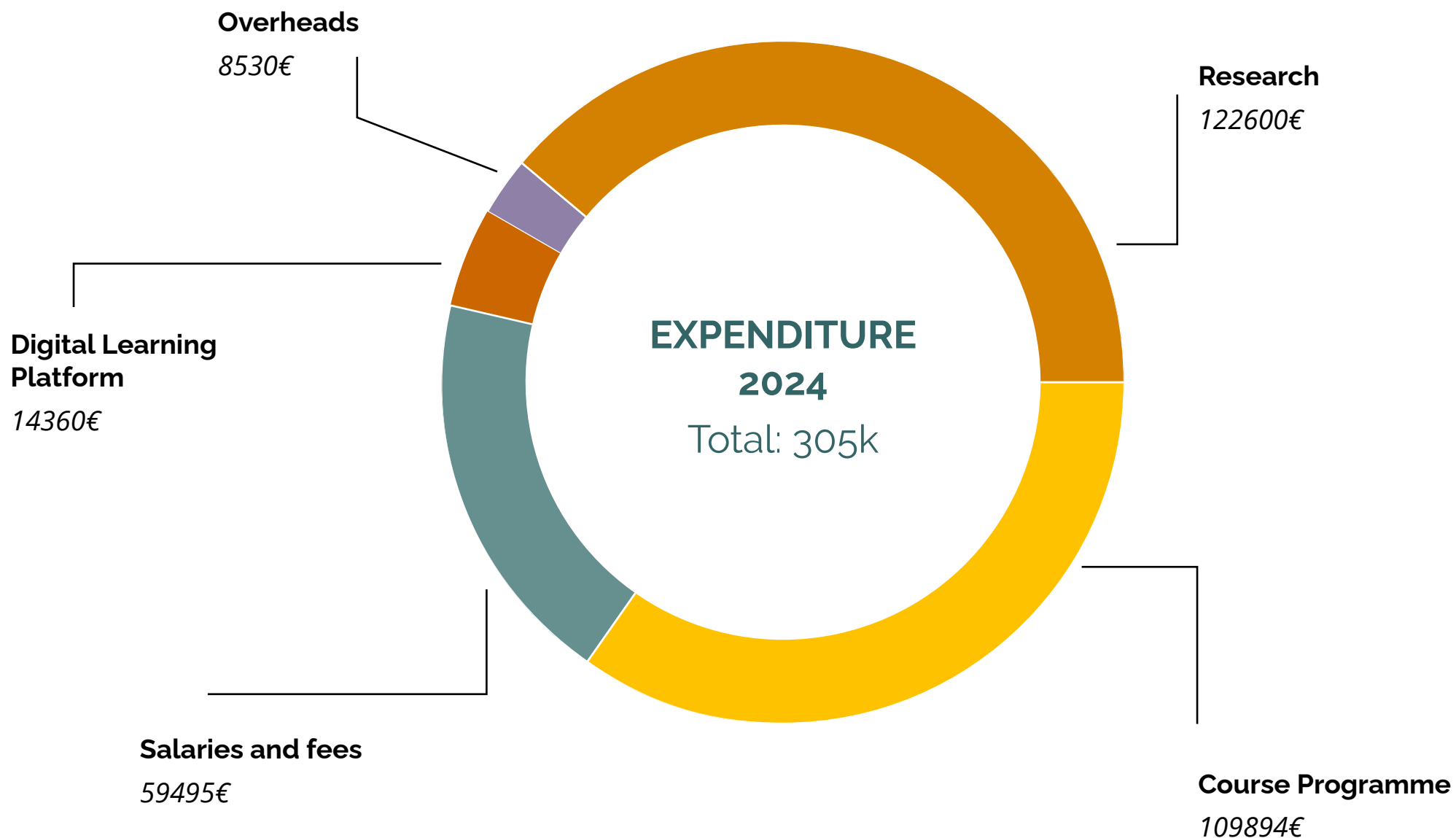


Previous courses can be browsed
by year or by topic.



HOW WE RAISE OUR MONEY





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