

Lawyers for Lawyers 2025 Annual Board Report

1. Introduction

In 2025, Lawyers for Lawyers continued to strengthen its capacity to protect and promote the independence of lawyers worldwide. Building on the professionalization efforts initiated in 2024, the organization focused on consolidating governance structures, expanding strategic advocacy, and increasing thematic depth across its programs.

The year was marked by both growth and reflection. While preserving the flexibility and solidarity that characterize Lawyers for Lawyers, deliberate steps were taken to enhance structure, sustainability, and strategic focus. These developments prepared the organization for further growth and for its 40th anniversary in 2026.

2. Mission and Strategic Framework

Lawyers for Lawyers promotes and protects the independence of lawyers worldwide and defends their right to practice law freely and independently, without fear of reprisal, in accordance with internationally recognized standards, including the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

In 2025, Lawyers for Lawyers continued to implement its Strategic Plan 2024–2028. A key milestone was the review and refinement of the organization’s Theory of Change, conducted with input from staff and approved by the Board. This process strengthened alignment between activities, outcomes, and long-term impact.

3. Methodology 2025

Lawyers for Lawyers has a strong track record in acting quickly and effectively to support lawyers in danger. Our international network and the way we operate, enable us to be flexible and amendable to fast-changing situations and developments.

Lawyers for Lawyers are practicing lawyers and human rights experts. We are therefore particularly well placed to monitor and highlight violations of lawyers’ rights and threats to their independence and to raise awareness of the harmful consequences thereof for upholding the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

Our board of directors, staff members and lawyer-volunteers have deep knowledge and expertise of the laws, standards and ethics underpinning the legal profession, the concept of the rule of law as well as international human rights laws and mechanisms. They also know how to apply these laws, concepts and mechanisms in practice.

3.1 Who we support - Where we work

Lawyers for Lawyers supports lawyers at risk in all continents of the world, especially lawyers who work in challenging environments.

We stand with lawyers who have the formal status of lawyers in accordance with domestic laws and are bound by recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession. At the same time, we may include lawyers who exercise the functions of lawyers but are not or not any longer formally recognized as such, for example because access to the legal profession has been refused to them or they have been suspended or disbarred on improper grounds as a reprisal of their work.

On the individual level we prioritize support to lawyers who are in imminent danger or acutely vulnerable. However, since our resources are limited, we are forced to make choices. These choices are based upon our capacity, expertise, and networks, as well as potential opportunities and impact. Also relevant is whether support is already or can be better provided by other organizations.

3.2 What we do - How we collaborate

In addition to emergency support and rapid assistance to lawyers in immediate danger, we provide a range of tools and preventive support to defend and protect lawyers from attacks and improper interference and to strengthen their international recognition and legal protection. At the same time, we empower lawyers and associations of lawyers to support, safeguard, and advocate for the independence of the legal profession on a more lasting basis at the domestic level.

We promote respect for the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers. In doing so, we act in collaboration or coordination with international bar associations, lawyers' organizations and other civil society actors.

Lawyers for Lawyers is a member of the BMO (*Breed Mensenrechten Overleg*), a coalition of human rights and development organizations based in the Netherlands.

We also engage with governments and international and regional intergovernmental institutions and their mechanisms. In 2013, Lawyers for Lawyers was granted consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), providing us access to this Council and its many subsidiaries bodies, to the Human Rights Council, to the various human rights mechanisms of the UN, as well as to special events organized by the President of the General Assembly.

3.3 How we make an impact

Lawyers for Lawyers acknowledges that it is often hard to tell whether our activities have contributed to or resulted in reducing or preventing attacks and restrictions against lawyers or improving legal protections, and if so, to what extent. When it comes to supporting lawyers, we define success in terms of making a positive difference for individual lawyers. We make a positive impact, when lawyers feel morally supported, when we offer a source of strength in times of need, or when their personal situation changes positively, e.g. they are released from prison, travel bans are lifted, disciplinary or criminal proceeding are withdrawn, etc. Our impact is also positive when lawyers feel empowered to support their colleague lawyers at home.

When it comes to structural support, we define success in terms of progress, e.g. is there an increased number of recommendations made by United Nations human rights mechanisms, strengthening the independence of lawyers and the legal profession that were originally issued by Lawyers for Lawyers or by organizations we are collaborating with or by governments we have engaged with; is there an increase in the number of governments we have engaged with, accepting those recommendations; are those supported recommendations implemented effectively; and do they result in positive changes for lawyers discharging their professional duties.

When defining performance indications for specific projects, we make a distinction between what outcomes may be reasonably expected, given our circle of influence, and what outcomes would be best in terms of achieving our mission, vision and goals.

To understand our impact, we monitor and evaluate the results of our activities on an on-going basis.

4. Programs, activities & impact

Lawyers for Lawyers continued to operate through its three strategic programs: *Defend, Empower, and Influence*. Across all programs, activities were needs-based, lawyer-led, and implemented in close coordination with local and international partners.

3.1 Defend

In 2025, Lawyers for Lawyers supported lawyers facing threats, intimidation, criminal prosecution, disciplinary proceedings, or other forms of reprisal related to their professional activities. Support included trial monitoring, public statements, advocacy, strategic litigation, and international solidarity actions.

Impact examples:

- Lawyers for Lawyers continued its trial monitoring activities, particularly in jurisdictions where proceedings against lawyers raised serious concerns regarding fair-trial rights and the independence of the legal profession. These monitoring efforts contributed to international visibility and diplomatic engagement.
- Through its Strategic Litigation Project, Lawyers for Lawyers submitted amicus briefs and third-party interventions in domestic and international proceedings, addressing structural threats to lawyer independence, professional secrecy, and freedom of expression.
- The organization issued numerous public statements concerning individual lawyers and broader patterns of repression, contributing to international pressure on authorities and providing moral support to affected lawyers.
- In 2025, Lawyers for Lawyers presented the **Lawyers for Lawyers Award**, recognizing an individual lawyer who demonstrated exceptional courage and commitment to the rule of law under difficult circumstances. The Award served both to honor the recipient and to draw public attention to the risks faced by lawyers worldwide.

3.2 Empower

Under the Empower program, Lawyers for Lawyers focused on strengthening lawyers and bar associations through training, peer exchange, and targeted capacity-building initiatives.

In 2025, the organization further developed a thematic approach, enabling deeper engagement and more coherent programming, particularly in relation to lawyers defending LGBTIQ+ rights and environmental lawyers at risk.

Impact examples:

- Under the Access to Justice Campaign, Lawyers for Lawyers continued research and engagement on the challenges faced by lawyers representing LGBTIQ+ clients, using findings to inform advocacy and training activities.
- Lawyers for Lawyers supported training and peer-exchange initiatives on professional ethics, disciplinary proceedings, and international protection mechanisms, in close cooperation with local partners.
- Preparatory work was undertaken for future study visits and exchange programs, aimed at strengthening international solidarity among lawyers.

3.3 Influence

Influence activities expanded in 2025, particularly at the international level, with increased engagement with United Nations human rights mechanisms.

A major development was the completion of a feasibility study on strengthening engagement with the United Nations. Based on its findings, the Board decided to establish a more permanent and structured UN advocacy presence from 2026 onwards.

Impact examples:

- Lawyers for Lawyers submitted multiple written reports and oral statements to UN human rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review, raising concerns about reprisals against lawyers.
- The organization engaged with diplomats, UN mandate holders, and civil society partners to promote stronger recognition of lawyers' independence and security.
- Advocacy efforts contributed to increased attention to the situation of lawyers in UN recommendations and concluding observations.

4. Shelter City Program

In 2025, Lawyers for Lawyers took a significant step in strengthening its support for lawyers at risk through its involvement in the Shelter City programme. In April 2025, the city of Amstelveen officially joined the international Shelter City network as the 14th Shelter City in the Netherlands, following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Municipality of Amstelveen, Lawyers for Lawyers, and Justice & Peace Netherlands.

Shelter City Amstelveen, coordinated by Lawyers for Lawyers, offers a dedicated respite programme specifically tailored to human rights lawyers who face risks due to their professional activities. As part of this programme, selected lawyers are hosted for a period of approximately three months, during which they are provided with a safe and supportive environment to rest, recover, and re-energise. They are also given opportunities to expand their professional network, engage with local stakeholders, and strengthen their skills, enabling them to continue their work more safely and effectively upon return to their home countries.

The initiative forms part of a broader global movement of Shelter Cities, aimed at providing temporary relocation and practical support to human rights defenders. Through this programme, Lawyers for Lawyers contributes to both immediate protection and longer-term resilience of lawyers under threat, combining individual support with international solidarity.

Preparations were made in 2025 to host the first lawyer in Amstelveen from September onwards and to further develop the programme in 2026 in collaboration with local authorities, academic institutions, and civil society partners

5. Organizational Development

5.1 Governance and professionalization

The professionalization trajectory initiated in 2024 continued throughout 2025. Roles and responsibilities were further clarified, decision-making processes refined, and internal policies evaluated. These steps improved accountability, continuity, and resilience, while preserving flexibility and responsiveness.

5.2 Staff growth and capacity

In 2025, Lawyers for Lawyers experienced significant growth in staff capacity. Over the course of the year, the organization expanded by a total of **5.7 FTE**, through a combination of new positions and increases in existing staff contracts. Furthermore, the work of the staff was in 2024 supported by 2 legal interns per semester, and one for the summer, who intern at our organization for 24 hours a week.

This growth enabled the organization to support more lawyers at risk, expand thematic work and strategic litigation activities, and strengthen advocacy, communication, and fundraising efforts. In parallel, Lawyers for Lawyers invested in staff development, including organization-wide storytelling training and individual skills development.

5.3 Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)

In 2025, Lawyers for Lawyers continued to implement regular Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) cycles. These cycles were embedded in quarterly planning and evaluation processes and supported evidence-based decision-making, internal learning, and adaptive programming.

5.4 Lawyers for Lawyers Network

The lawyers who dedicate their time and expertise to Lawyers for Lawyers on a pro bono basis are essential to the fulfilment of our mission and significantly outnumber our paid staff. A key organizational development in 2025 was the further consolidation of a sustainable international network of volunteer lawyers.

The year 2025 marked the first full year in which this new network structure was piloted. The network expanded substantially, supported by structured onboarding and selection processes, and enabled both lawyers from the Netherlands and abroad to become more actively involved in the work of Lawyers for Lawyers.

Evaluation of this pilot phase demonstrated that the new structure has been highly effective. It resulted in increased output, more efficient and professional cooperation, and a stronger alignment between volunteer expertise and organizational needs. The network now plays an increasingly important role in extending the organization's reach and enhancing its capacity to support lawyers at risk worldwide.

5.1 Board

Lawyers for Lawyers has a Board comprised of practicing lawyers and human rights experts.

Board members in 2025:

Jeroen Brouwer - President (until 31 August 2025, from 1 September 2025 member)

Maaïke de Jong – Secretary

Jan de Koning - Treasurer

Maaïke Bomers – Member

Sander Oudshoorn – Member (until 30 September 2025)

Jan Leliveld – Member (until 31 August 2025, from 1 September 2025 President)

6. Communication

Following the renewal of branding and the launch of the new website at the end of 2024, 2025 focused on further development and implementation of the communication strategy. The website was continuously improved to better communicate the organization's work, impact, and priorities to different stakeholders.

Toward the end of 2025, Lawyers for Lawyers strengthened its communication capacity through the hiring of a Communications and Fundraising Officer, enabling further professionalization of communication efforts and stronger alignment between communication and fundraising objectives.

7. Funding and financial overview

Lawyers for Lawyers is supported entirely by financial donations and in-kind support, mainly from individual lawyers, law firms, lawyers' associations and other organizations related to the legal profession. We raise funds by cultivating relationships and partnerships in the legal sector and through third-party events. We sometimes also receive royalties from an author or composer for each copy of a legal book that has been sold or fees for a service that has been provided, such as a legal training.

To safeguard its independence and integrity, Lawyers for Lawyers operates under an Ethical Funding Policy. This policy sets out the principles governing the acceptance of funding and aims to prevent undue influence and conflicts of interest. All donations and funding contributions are assessed against these principles before acceptance. A summary of the Ethical Funding Policy is available on the Lawyers for Lawyers website.

Lawyers for Lawyers has been recognized as a charity by the Central Bureau on Fundraising (CBF), i.e. “*CBF-erkend goed doel*”. Lawyers for Lawyers is also tax-exempted under Dutch law. It qualifies as a Public Benefit Organisation (ANBI status).

The reserves of Lawyer for Lawyers are at a level that is considered to be justified by the Herkströter Committee (Commission on Capital Standards for Charities), i.e. a continuity reserve of a maximum of one and a half times the annual turnover.

At the end of 2022, we received a large donation which makes it possible for our organization in the coming five years to further professionalize our approach to organizational development to enhance the effectiveness, potential, and capacity of our people, processes, and resources in achieving our mission. The board of Lawyers for Lawyers designated this donation as a reserve to ‘increase capacity’ of our organization and in 2023 a plan was written on how to spend this donation to reach this goal. This included hiring extra staff in 2024.

7.1 Analysis of the difference between actual results and budget 2025

For Lawyers for Lawyers, it is generally difficult to accurately estimate the costs associated with specific activities, such as trial monitoring missions, needs assessments, fact-finding missions, and the Lawyers for Lawyers Award. This is partly due to the involvement of volunteers, who regularly cover part of the costs of their activities themselves. When preparing the budget, costs such as travel and accommodation expenses may be included, while these are ultimately paid by volunteers or law firms. Conversely, costs may arise during the year that could not reasonably be foreseen at the time the budget was prepared. As a result, the actual costs of individual activities may differ from the budgeted amounts.

The 2025 budget deliberately incorporated a multi-year investment programme aimed at the further professionalisation of the organisation, particularly in the area of fundraising. As part of this strategy, a negative result of €31,583 was budgeted for 2025. These investments were intended to strengthen the organisation’s fundraising capacity and long-term sustainability.

In 2025, Lawyers for Lawyers worked with a professional fundraiser for the first time. While this collaboration marked an important step in the further professionalisation of fundraising efforts, achieving the ambitious fundraising targets proved to be more challenging than anticipated. Income from corporate partnerships and non-profit organisations was therefore lower than budgeted. In particular, securing funding from private foundations took longer than expected. At the same time, income from individual donations exceeded budget expectations, thanks to several substantial unsolicited donations.

In 2025, allocation keys were also introduced for the first time to attribute general organisational costs across the various activities of the organisation. As a result, costs that were previously recorded entirely as overhead are now partly allocated to programme activities and fundraising. Since this methodology was not yet applied in 2024, the actual figures for 2024 and 2025 are only comparable to a limited extent.

Fundraising expenses were ultimately lower than budgeted. Although the budget had anticipated significant investments in the further professionalisation of fundraising activities, certain costs incurred during the year were financed through the designated reserve for *capacity strengthening*. In addition, the organisation carefully managed expenditures throughout the year. As a result, actual fundraising costs were lower than initially budgeted, while the intended strengthening of the fundraising function continued.

Personnel expenses were also lower than budgeted. This is partly explained by the aforementioned allocation of a portion of general organisational costs to the various activities of the organisation.

Overall expenditure on programme objectives was in line with the budget. Virtually all planned projects and programmes were implemented, supported in part by previously awarded multi-year project funding. During the year, however, the focus of certain activities shifted between programme objectives. This reflects the fact that new activities may arise during the year, or new needs among the target group may become apparent, requiring a flexible response from Lawyers for Lawyers. Despite these shifts, total spending on programme objectives as a whole remained in accordance with the 2025 budget.

Overall, the lower income, combined with the continuation of planned activities and investments in the further professionalisation of the organisation, resulted in a negative result of €16,655 for 2025. While this differs from the budgeted result, the actual deficit was significantly lower than the budgeted negative result of €31,583. The variance between budget and actual results is primarily attributable to lower-than-expected income from institutional and corporate fundraising, while at the same time part of the planned investments was not charged to the statement of income and expenditure.

8. Remuneration of the Executive Director

The Board, acting on the recommendation of the Remuneration Committee, has established the remuneration policy, the level of the Executive Director's remuneration, and the level of other remuneration components. The policy is reviewed and updated periodically. The most recent evaluation took place in December 2024.

In determining its remuneration policy and setting the Executive Director's remuneration, Lawyers for Lawyers follows the Remuneration Scheme for Directors of Charitable Organisations (*Regeling beloning directeuren van goede doelen*), as adopted by Goede Doelen Nederland and effective from 1 January 2025.

This scheme uses a number of weighting criteria to determine a maximum annual income. The assessment of Lawyers for Lawyers was carried out by the Remuneration Committee and resulted in a BSD (Basisscore Directiefunctie) score of 325 points. Based on the applicable remuneration scheme, this corresponds to a maximum annual income of €102,546 for a full-time position (1 FTE, 12 months).

For 2025, the relevant actual remuneration of the Executive Director, S. de Graaf (0.8 FTE, 12 months), amounted to €63,054, including holiday allowance, year-end bonus, and employer pension contributions. This remuneration remained well within the applicable maximum. Based on the BSD score of 325, the maximum total remuneration permitted under the scheme, including pension contributions and other taxable benefits, was €133,310 per year.

The remuneration, employer pension contribution, and any other benefits were considered reasonable and proportionate in relation to the position and responsibilities of the Executive Director.

Further details regarding the amount and composition of the remuneration are disclosed in the notes to the statement of income and expenditure in the annual accounts.

9. Risks and continuity

The Board regularly reviews the key risks faced by the organization. Principal risks include fluctuations in fundraising income, dependence on a limited number of funding streams, and increasing pressure on staff capacity due to a growing volume and complexity of cases.

These risks are mitigated through income diversification, growth of organizational capacity, active board oversight, and the implementation of MEL cycles. Based on current insights, the Board is confident that Lawyers for Lawyers has sufficient resilience and reserves to ensure continuity of its operations.

10. Integrity and ethical conduct

Integrity is a core value of Lawyers for Lawyers and underpins all its activities. The organization acts independently, objectively, and with integrity, and adheres to strict standards on transparency, accountability, and responsible conduct.

Lawyers for Lawyers has adopted an Integrity Policy, published on its website, which addresses issues such as conflicts of interest, safeguarding, respectful workplace behaviour, and responsible cooperation with partners. Compliance with this policy is monitored by management and the Board. Where relevant, concerns can be reported and addressed through established procedures.

11. Looking ahead

The board of Lawyers for Lawyers has updated the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 in 2023, and has produced a strategic plan for 2024-2028 which will be followed in 2024. The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to inform our continued journey to be an internationally recognized expert in promoting and safeguarding the independence of individual lawyers and the legal profession across the world, serving as a catalyst for a safe and enabling environment for lawyers.

In the next years, we will continue to strengthening our work in support of lawyers under threat. We will do so by further enhancing, aligning, and expanding our Defend, Empower, and Influence programs, and through ongoing collaboration and alliances' building with stakeholders.

Throughout the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2024 – 2028, we will monitor and evaluate our progress and results and capture lessons learned. We will solicit and act upon feedback from lawyers at risk, board members, staff members, volunteers, and other stakeholders, and be adaptive to changing developments and demands as appropriate.

The developments of 2025 strengthened Lawyers for Lawyers' ability to deliver impact at scale. With clearer structures, strengthened advocacy capacity, and continued investment in people, partnerships, and integrity, the organization is well positioned to further expand its work in 2026, including through an enhanced UN presence and the celebration of its 40th anniversary.

The strategic plan 2024-2028 is available on our website.