

JANUARY/ FEBRUARY 2024

SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Samos Legal Centre's 28th newsletter!

January and February were particularly busy for the Samos Legal Centre, as the team also saw a number of changes. Bintou* came back to Samos as a Legal and technical assistant. Lucile was hired to provide occasional support to the mission. Emma and Valentin have also joined us for 6 months as caseworkers volunteers.

Since their arrival, they have been adapting to the regular changes in practices and the difficulties faced by the team on a daily basis.



For instance, the asylum office has repeatedly cancelled interviews, even though they had been scheduled for months. People who have come to the asylum office are facing the frustrating news that the planned interviews are not taking place, leaving them in a state of uncertainty, with no clear information on the rescheduling of the interview. This uncertainty leads to growing frustration among asylum seekers, on top of the distress caused by the disgraceful living conditions in the camp.

**Bintou was a caseworker volunteer at the Samos Legal Centre from July to December 2023 (see Newsletter no. 27).*

Focus on our activities



Every day, one team member is dedicated to replying to messages on WhatsApp.

- From a simple "**Hello ASFF**" to "**How do I get married in Greece**". Our hotline is the platform we use with displaced persons in Samos to follow them through their procedure and organise a meeting for individualised advice.
- This is often the only means of communication for people living in precarious conditions. For the past few months, our volunteer caseworkers have been exposed to numerous **messages of psychological distress**, and **trauma disclosure**, reflecting the direct impact that living conditions in the camp have on the mental health of exiles.

46

messages to be processed per day on average
*Based on the number of messages when the hotline is opened on the morning

15

people who have not yet been in contact with us write to us on average every day

The hotline



The reception



Every day, one of our volunteer caseworkers is available in the reception to welcome people in the Centre.

In addition to the appointments already made, we receive on average between **5 and 10 people a day in our office**,

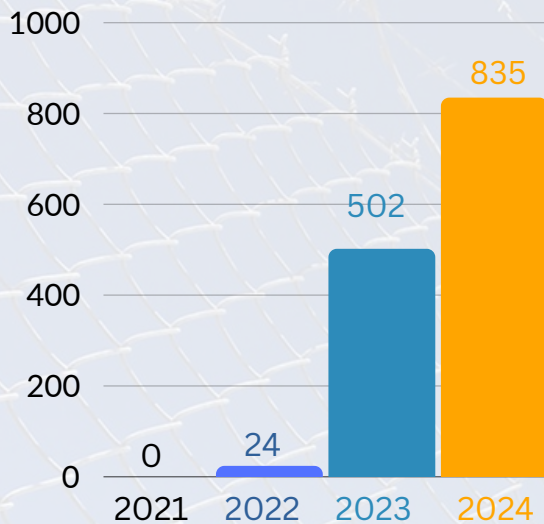
- to request a **consultation appointment**
- to **ask questions** about the asylum procedure
- simply to find out about **our work**

In January, a volunteer interpreter helped us with this task, to welcome people who spoke Arabic, as this was the most commonly requested language.



JANUARY AND FEBRUARY FIGURES

Number of arrivals over the last period

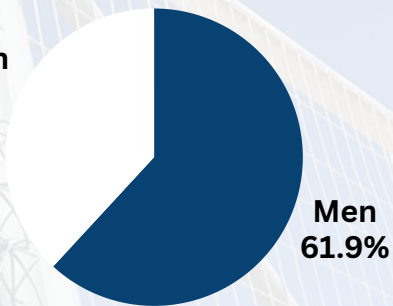


Our team over the period:



People supported over the period:

Women
38.1%



Men
61.9%

10% of them shared with us that they had been victims of sexual and/or gender-based violence

83

individual preparations for the asylum interview

THANK YOU LUCILE !

From mid-December 2023 to mid-February 2024, Lucile has been recruited as a legal officer to support the team during this particularly busy period, after working for 6 months with our partner Samos Volunteers. Her knowledge of the island context and her previous experience in Greece were a precious asset, and she immediately impressed us with her ability to be operational and to integrate into the team.

Thanks to her arrival, the Centre was able to continue to carry out as many of its activities as possible during this period. In fact, her ability to adapt and her efficiency enabled the team to benefit from support on a wide range of tasks (casework, communication, advocacy, etc.).

Thank you, Lucile, for your hard work and dedication. We wish you all the best in your future assignments!



TESTIMONY

A BRUTAL FAMILY SEPARATION

M* first contacted the legal centre in November 2021 after his difficult arrival in Samos. He had just crossed the island of Samos and was hiding to call for help when his wife and two young children, who were hiding in the forest at the time, were approached by the Greek police, who illegally and violently pushed them back towards Turkish waters.

The dangerous situation in Syria prompted him to flee with his family in March 2021 as the war continued. He was alone when he had to attend his first admissibility interview in Turkey, at which he had to show why Turkey was not a safe country for him.



A DIFFICULT RECOGNITION

His first application and his subsequent application were rejected by the asylum service, which considered Turkey to be a "safe country" for him. This was without taking into account the fact that his family had been forcibly deported there, and that living conditions in Turkey are generally precarious, with discriminatory treatment preventing them from working legally, integrating into Turkish society and living a normal life. We followed M* through the complex appeal procedure and the second subsidiary application.

It was only in 2023, 2 years after his arrival in Greece, that he was finally granted international protection, after his wife and daughters had managed to join him in Samos.



M*'s case is a dramatic illustration of the violent and illegal practice of pushbacks, in violation of international law.

Advocacy

THE GREEK OMBUDSMAN HAS FOUND THAT THE RECEPTION AND IDENTIFICATION SERVICE (RIS) OF THE SAMOS CLOSED CONTROLLED ACCESS CENTRE (CCAC) UNLAWFULLY RESTRICTS LAWYERS' ACCESS TO THE SITE.

After a joint complaint from I Have Rights, Human Rights Legal Project and Avocats Sans Frontières France, concerning lawyers' access to the CCAC, the Defender of Rights issued a response in January.

He noted that, given the short timeframes involved in the asylum procedure, it is important that there are no unnecessary formalities and that the CCAC authorities show flexibility. For example, the RIS cannot require lawyers to give one day's notice when visiting their clients at the CCAC.



CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS UNITE THEIR VOICES TO DENOUNCE THE INHUMANE AND DEGRADING LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE SAMOS CCAC AND THE CONTINUED FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

On 31 January, together with 19 organisations, we once again called for the closure of the Samos CCAC. In the meantime, we call on the Greek authorities and the European Commission to respect people's fundamental rights by guaranteeing :

- ☑ adequate accommodation
- ☑ An end to de facto illegal detention
- ☑ vulnerability assessments
- ☑ Access to medical care
- ☑ Water needs are met
- ☑ Adequate food
- ☑ Accessible transport to and from the CCAC

