

MARCH/ APRIL 2024

# SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER

*Welcome to the Samos Legal Centre's 29th newsletter!*

*In this issue, you will get an insight into the centre's activities during March and April. You will learn about some new practices introduced in the Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) over the last few months, and gain a better understanding of what the team calls an "interview preparation". This newsletter is also the time to highlight the amazing work of our team of interpreters on the field.*

## **Context update: a new practice in the CCAC**



Since January 2024, several people have contacted us about a waiver statement of their reception rights that the camp authorities have made them sign. This practice was initiated by the camp management to lift the geographical restrictions imposed on asylum seekers if they agreed to give up their reception rights. This means they would give up their right to be housed in a camp in Greece or in any other state reception structure, to receive meal rations and to benefit from financial assistance from the Greek authorities.

Not everyone understood the exact content of this declaration or the consequences of waiving these rights as part of their asylum application.

The Samos Legal Center team is worried about the consequences of this practice. An Ombudsman complaint has been filed on the initiative of our partner I Have Rights.

# Focus on our activities



## Interview preparation

54

Is the average number of preparations made by caseworkers per month.

2H30

Is the average time of a preparation session. When possible we try to meet with the applicant more than one time.

3

Is the average number of accompaniments provided by the lawyers per month.

In Greece, the examination of asylum applications is largely based on **oral statements made by people during their interview with the Greek Asylum Service (GAS)**. An important part of the work of ASFF's caseworkers is to prepare the beneficiaries of the Samos Legal Centre for this interview.

The questions asked by the GAS do not sufficiently take into account people's psychological state and their ability to talk about trauma. **The work of caseworkers is all the more important as it creates a caring environment for survivors of torture and/or SGBV to testify, sometimes for the first time.**

Preparing for an interview can be an emotionally triggering time. It is hence particularly important that **preparations take place in the best possible conditions, with sufficient time and the participation of an interpreter if necessary.**

This preparation is crucial as the GAS has specific methods to conduct these interviews. For example, the question "how are you?" is asked at the beginning and the applicant is supposed to address any vulnerability or health issue when answering. Additionally, in the majority of cases, **the appeal committee takes its decision based on the advice of the GAS during the interview. In 2023, 89,9% of applicants received a negative decision on appeal. Therefore, the interview is their best chance of obtaining international protection in Europe.**

### The admissibility interview, a greek specificity

Since the 2016 EU-Turkey deal on the hotspot islands in Greece, Syrians arriving on EU soil have to pass an admissibility interview. Instead of being interviewed for international protection, they are interviewed about their stay in Turkey.

The aim is to verify whether Turkey could be considered a safe country for them. If this is the case, they are rejected on the grounds that their asylum claim is not admissible on EU/Greek soil.

Since the joint ministerial decision of 2021, this procedure has been applicable all over Greece for Bengalis, Pakistanis, Somalis, Afghans and Syrians.



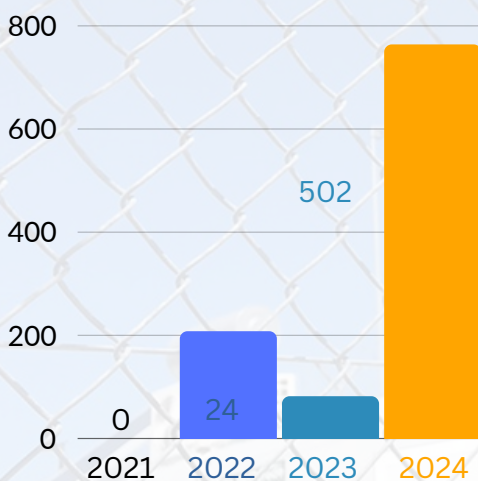
# Interview accompaniment

In some cases, our two lawyers can accompany an applicant during his/her interview. They are not allowed to speak. However, **they have the right to intervene if they notice a procedural fault likely to affect the applicant's case.** Additionally, they may ask questions to the applicant at the end of the interview. At this stage, the lawyer could question the applicant about important facts he/she did not mention during the interview and that are crucial for the case. Missing information can be due to many reasons including the fact that the applicant was not questioned by the interviewer, a lack of time, misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

Furthermore, for a **vulnerable applicant who does not feel confident to talk and to share personal information such as SGBV, human trafficking, torture, sexual orientation, the lawyer will support her/him by ensuring they are in a safe space** where they can express their feelings and arguments. Given that the majority of asylum seekers have had traumatising experiences in their country of origin, it is difficult for them to talk about such events (PTSD). It has also been observed that, in some cases, **the interviewers conduct more efficient interviews in the lawyer's presence.**

## MARCH AND APRIL FIGURES

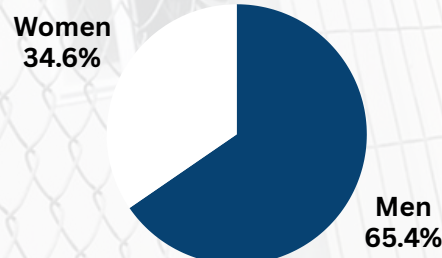
Number of arrivals over the last period:



Our team over the last period:



People supported over the last period:



7.8% of them shared with us that they have been victims of sexual and/or gender-based violence

97

individual preparations for asylum interviews

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# TESTIMONY

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## *The long journey of an unaccompanied minor...*

H\* arrived from Somalia in November 2021, when he was 16 years old. While he was initially registered as an unaccompanied minor and placed in the safe zone, the camp administration decided a month later to place him in the general section, among adults.

Confused and psychologically fragile, he contacted the Samos Legal Centre. We helped him through the procedure for recognising his status of minor.

It was a very long and arduous procedure, because the asylum service only agrees to rectify a date of birth on condition that an original birth certificate is provided. This document is impossible to obtain for someone who has fled his country because of army group persecution.

The only option was to undergo an 'age assessment' by a doctor. Which, in his case, took several months due to the lack of qualified doctors on site.



*I was very happy when I saw the letter you wrote to me, and you are the first person to help me, the day I asked for help, I don't know how to thank you, I wish you peace.  
I want when I get my legal documents that my life will change a lot so that I can have a good life and a good job.*

When interviewed as an adult, his asylum application was first rejected on the grounds that he was unable to demonstrate why Turkey was unsafe for him.

He was actually a minor when he had to spend 2 months in Turkey, totally alone and with no adult to guide him.

One of our lawyers represented him in his subsequent application procedure, with the aim of asserting his status as a minor. It was not until July 2023 that a medical examination was able to certify that he was 17 years old, enabling him to pass the admissibility interview on Turkey. Dimitra accompanied him to his second interview on Somalia.

**In April 2024, he learned that he had finally been recognised as a refugee by Greece.**

# WORKING WITH INTERPRETERS



Working together with interpreters is of great importance for our project.

Our volunteer interpreters are not only very motivated and professional in what they do but they also share cultural insights with the rest of the team, as they are refugees themselves or asylum seekers from our target countries. They therefore contribute to a better understanding of the countries' context and to overcome any language or cultural barriers in communicating with our beneficiaries.

Both our caseworkers and lawyers work closely with our interpreters on a regular basis in order to prepare asylum seekers who contact us for their interviews with the asylum service, to discuss with them issues regarding interview accompaniments or to support them in filing an appeal in the language they understand best and feel more comfortable communicating in. As our lawyers and caseworkers are mainly English and French speakers, we generally collaborate with Arabic, Farsi, Lingala and Krio interpreters.



*" It's a great honor to work with ASFF as an Arabic interpreter. I have been working with them for a year now. I participated in a lot of workshops and individual consultations. I gain a lot of experience and saw a lot of success. I am very proud to work with the volunteers that I have met and proud of all the asylum seekers we have helped."*

Hasan, Arabic interpreter with ASFF since March 2023

## Advocacy

### 161 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS CALL ON MEPS TO REJECT THE HARMFUL EU MIGRATION PACT

On 10 April, the MEPs voted for the implementation of the new European pact on migration during the plenary session.

ASFF, along with 160 other organisations, repeatedly called for the MEPs to reject this pact during the session in order to give a political signal against the adoption of a pact that would undermine fundamental rights.

