

SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER

Context, Challenges and Accountability: Legal and Protection Updates from the Past Months

Over the past months, the operational context on Samos has remained marked by **administrative barriers, limited access to services, and systemic delays** that continue to affect people seeking and benefiting from international protection. Despite a decrease in arrivals, the situation on the island remains complex, requiring sustained legal advocacy, coordination with medical actors, and continuous follow-up with authorities to ensure access to basic rights.

Shifting Context: Fewer Arrivals, Increasing Restrictions

Between **January and March 2026, 316 people were registered to seek asylum on Samos**, according to official figures from the Hellenic Ministry of Migration. This represents a clear **decrease compared to the previous year**, a trend that may be linked to increasingly restrictive migration policies, reports of pushbacks, and broader patterns of criminalisation affecting people on the move.

At the same time, transfers from Samos to the mainland, a key mechanism to relieve pressure on the island and ensure access to services, have remained limited. Between January and March 2026, **only less than 200 people were transferred**. While this represents a slight increase compared to previous months, transfers remain significantly lower than in earlier periods and are largely restricted to specific categories, particularly unaccompanied minors.

Even in urgent medical cases, transfers have not always taken place in a timely manner. In some instances, medical organisations or individuals themselves have been required to cover transportation costs after authorities reported insufficient funds. Meanwhile, many people continue to submit transfer requests independently, particularly to reunite with family members on the mainland, yet most of these requests remain unresolved.

Persistent Legal and Administrative Barriers

Since October 2025, legal and administrative obstacles have continued to affect both asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, particularly during the **post-recognition phase**. Significant delays, and in some cases refusals, have been recorded in scheduling fingerprinting appointments required to obtain residence permits (ADET) and travel documents. These delays effectively block access to essential legal documentation and restrict freedom of movement and integration prospects.

Some refusals appeared linked to previous decisions by applicants to decline transfers to the mainland, raising concerns about **disproportionate or potentially punitive administrative practices**. These concerns were formally raised through a joint submission with other NGO's present in the island to the Greek Ombudsman.

Access to legal support has also faced operational challenges. Lawyers' access to the facility was, at times, restricted through systematic accompaniment by private security personnel and limitations on entry. Following formal intervention, these practices have been partially eased, although monitoring continues.

At the same time, individuals continue to be required to exit the Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) within legal time limits despite lacking the necessary documentation to secure housing or services. This has contributed to a growing risk of homelessness. Currently, **six individuals remain outside the centre in precarious conditions**, despite available capacity within the facility.

These ongoing gaps between formal recognition of protection and actual access to rights highlight the continued need for **legal safeguards, timely administrative procedures, and accountability mechanisms**.

Sustained Legal Support and Advocacy

In response to these challenges, the legal team has maintained continuous support throughout the asylum process, with a strong focus on facilitating communication between applicants and the Greek Asylum Service, a process often complicated by slow responses and complex administrative procedures.

Legal interventions have taken place at multiple stages to defend applicants' rights and address urgent procedural needs. These have included:

- Requests for **priority examination of cases** based on urgent medical or psychological conditions.
- Referrals for **vulnerability assessments**, including for individuals potentially affected by trafficking.
- Administrative follow-ups on **urgent or unresolved procedural matters**.
- Direct communication with authorities through formal written submissions and follow-up calls.

During the reporting period, the legal team submitted **67 official communications and requests to relevant authorities**, complemented by sustained telephone follow-ups to ensure acknowledgment and timely action.

As part of these activities, the team met and accompanied **three women identified as victims of human trafficking**, ensuring that they received appropriate legal guidance, referrals, and protection support throughout the process.

These actions demonstrate the importance of **persistent legal advocacy**, particularly in a system where delays and administrative gaps can have immediate and severe consequences for individuals' safety and stability.

Medical Access and Living Conditions

Medical provision within the camp has remained **severely limited**, with no structural improvements reported in the Hippokrates programme run by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The programme's operational capacity remains difficult to assess due to the limited and part-time presence of medical staff, affecting continuity of care.

Access to healthcare remains restricted by procedural barriers, including mandatory passage through controlled entry points and initial triage conducted by non-medical security personnel. These practices hinder timely medical assessment and delay access to necessary treatment.

Coordination between medical actors and camp management has also remained limited, affecting operational predictability.

Looking Ahead: The Need for Accountability and Systemic Solutions

Overall, the situation on Samos continues to illustrate a **persistent gap between policy commitments and practical implementation**. While formal recognition of international protection remains a critical step, it does not automatically translate into effective access to rights, housing, documentation, healthcare, or mobility.

Our work over the past months has focused on **bridging these gaps**, ensuring that individuals are not left without support due to administrative delays or procedural obstacles. The continued need for written interventions, direct advocacy, and case follow-up demonstrates that accountability mechanisms remain essential.

Moving forward, sustained attention is required to:

- Ensure **timely processing of legal documentation**
- Improve **access to healthcare services**
- Increase **safe and timely transfers to the mainland**
- Prevent **homelessness specially among recognized refugees**
- Safeguard **access to legal support**

These priorities remain central to protecting the rights and dignity of people seeking safety on Samos.



Hello Lawyers Without Borders, I wanted to say thank you for all the technical and psychological support. I know we haven't worked together much, but seeing you made me feel safe. Thank you for listening so attentively and for your efforts to help everyone. You are truly wonderful people. I wish you continued success and all the best. Take care of yourselves. We will stay in touch. Until next time.



*Words from M.A. a sudanese applicant
that got a positive decision*

THE PROJECT IN FIGURES

Field Team

6

sessions to provide legal information were organised

101

Asylum seekers attended legal workshops

28

volunteers from non-legal organisation participated to our online workshop

Between January and March, we worked with:

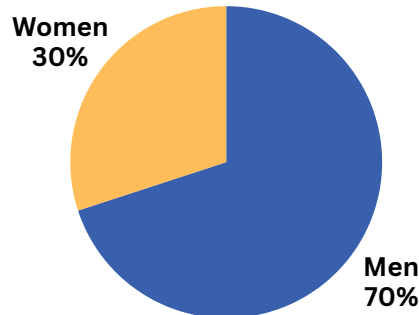
1 project manager

2 caseworkers

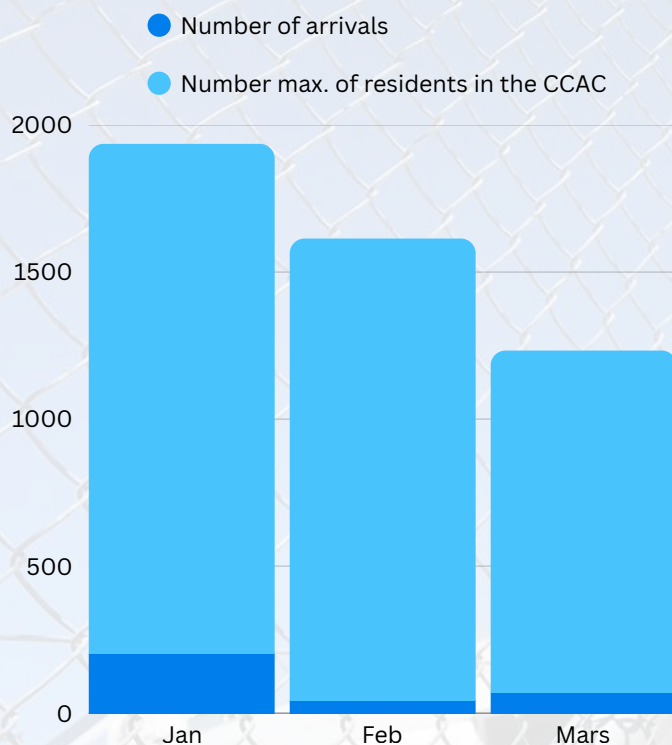
1 greek lawyers

6 interpreters

People directly supported :



33% of the people we met have declared having survived from SGBV, human trafficking or inhuman treatment.



*Data from the Greek Ministry of Migration

individual preparations for asylum interviews

63

requests sent to the authorities

67

Interview accompagnements

7



An average of **14 conversations** to answer to every morning. Messages received in around **ten different languages**. In total **800 messages** in this period.

130 new numbers contacted us on our hotline.

FAMILIES' STORIES

Our team met a **family of five from Sudan** who had fled the war in their country, fearing that their children could be recruited by armed groups. From our very first meeting, it was clear how deeply the conflict had affected the children. One of them, in particular, struggled to speak about what he had witnessed at such a young age.

In collaboration with MSF, we were able to secure a medical certificate documenting his condition. **During his asylum interview, our lawyer stood beside him, offering reassurance and support throughout the process.** Together, we gathered legal documents, medical reports, and country-of-origin information about the situation in Sudan, strengthening the case for him and his entire family.

Today, they continue to wait for a decision, and we remain by their side, checking in regularly and supporting them through the uncertainty. Their story reminds us that behind every application is a child carrying memories of conflict, and a family hoping for safety and stability.

We supported a **single mother from Guinea who arrived with her three young children**, carrying the responsibility of protecting them on her own.

As part of her asylum preparation, we worked closely with her ahead of her interview, focusing particularly on the risks her daughter faced, including the threat of female genital mutilation. In coordination with MSF, her daughter was referred for medical assessment, and a certificate was issued to support their case. During this process, additional medical concerns arose regarding her youngest child's skin condition, and the family received support to cover the cost of their medical transfer.

Throughout her journey, she expressed how meaningful it was to receive clear explanations about her rights and responsibilities during the asylum process. Preparing for her interview was not easy, but with guidance and reassurance, she felt better equipped to tell her story.

Today, the family continues to wait for their decision, holding onto hope for a positive outcome. Her words of gratitude remind us how access to information, legal guidance, and medical care can make an overwhelming process feel possible, and how accompaniment can restore a sense of dignity in moments of uncertainty.

Here is a part of a message that she sent to the team a few weeks ago:

"Our legal adviser explained our rights and obligations to us during the interview, which had a positive impact. We are awaiting the decision from the asylum service, which should be issued shortly, and we are hoping for good news. And the AsfSamoss Legal Centre continues to support us right through to the end of our application process. I am sharing this testimony simply to thank them for the free services they have provided and continue to provide."

MORE STORIES & GOOD NEWS!

Our team supported a **woman from Cameroon** who was forced to flee her country in the aftermath of political unrest linked to contested elections. Her family had been closely connected to the opposition movement, placing them at serious risk.

During our preparation sessions, it became clear how many hardships she had endured long before reaching Greece. **She had survived years of violence and exploitation and was forced to leave her children behind when she fled for safety.**

Later, she learned that her youngest daughter and their father had lost their lives due to their political involvement. Since then, she has had no news of her two sons and continues to live with the uncertainty of not knowing where they are or whether they are safe.

Her journey to Europe brought further trauma, including exploitation along the migration route. Recognizing her vulnerability, we ensured that she received continuous legal and psychological support. Our lawyer accompanied her throughout her interviews, offering reassurance and helping her share her story in a safe and supported environment. We also collaborated closely with MSF to ensure she had access to the care she needed.

Just a month and a half after her final interview, she received the news that **she had been granted refugee status**. Today, while rebuilding her life in safety, she continues to hold onto hope of finding her two missing sons. Together with tracing services from the Red Cross, efforts are ongoing to locate them.

Her story reminds us that protection is not only about legal recognition, but also about restoring hope after years of uncertainty.

Our team also met a young woman from Sierra Leone who arrived alone at the age of 25 after surviving trafficking, forced marriage, and gender-based violence. **Like many women traveling alone, she carried both visible and invisible scars from her journey.**

From her first visit to our office, building trust was essential. With the support of her lawyer, she began preparing for her asylum interview, an experience she initially feared. Sharing her story was difficult, and at times overwhelming, but step by step, she found the courage to speak about what she had endured.

This a message she shared with us before obtaining her **refugee status** last month:

"I had a very good experience with you. My lawyer was Natalia and when I met her, she was very polite and encouraging. I felt like I belong. She gave me courage to tell my story. All of her colleagues are also very nice. When I told her my story, she was very empathic because I was crying a lot and I felt more confident. She did a lot for me and helped me a lot because I did not want a transfer. I am very grateful for her. She was here with me during my interview, she was kind and it helped to boost my confidence. During the interview, I was afraid of the man, but because of her presence, I felt loved, trusted, protected and confident. All the members of the team are checking on me every week, I appreciate this so much and they are all very nice. Your team is the best and I always recommend you to other people.

My life in the camp is a normal routine. It is very stressful when you don't know the outcome of your case. The food is bad. I am a bit traumatized but at least I felt safe in the camp."

UPDATES ADVOCACY

Building on internal discussions and continued exchanges with partner organisations, the project has further developed its reflection on more structured and coordinated advocacy efforts, with a particular focus on Samos. While many of the challenges on the island are well documented by field actors, they often remain insufficiently visible at decision-making level. **Strengthening evidence-based, collective advocacy therefore remains a key priority moving forward.**

This framework supports a more strategic and forward-looking approach, ensuring that our operational work is closely linked to broader efforts aimed at addressing systemic gaps in the asylum and reception system on the island. In this context, we continue to engage in joint initiatives with partners, contributing to shared monitoring and coordinated responses to developments affecting people on the move.

Over the past months, we have also been closely monitoring a number of concerning practices observed on the ground.

In **January 2026**, we were informed that RIS had begun requesting recognised refugees, prior to granting them appointments for fingerprinting to obtain their residence documents, to report individuals allegedly hiding in the CCAC in order to avoid eviction. Given the clearly unlawful nature of such a practice, we immediately began coordinating with other actors to document these cases and assess possible legal steps to ensure it is brought to an end as soon as possible. This situation has been particularly difficult to address, notably due to the lack of communication with RIS, which has consistently not responded to our requests. Monitoring efforts are therefore ongoing, in close collaboration with partners.

In **February**, we also contributed to collective advocacy initiatives at national level. Together with other organisations present in Greece, we co-signed a statement highlighting the lack of cash assistance for asylum seekers, published by **The Press Project**. In parallel, as part of the **Aegean NGO Network**, we contributed to [a statement addressing the impact of recent legislative developments on NGO work on the islands](#), published on **ReliefWeb**.

In **March**, we published our [first quarterly monitoring report with the Aegean NGO Network](#), also made available on **ReliefWeb**. We additionally participated in ongoing advocacy coordination meetings on Samos, aiming to align strategies and strengthen collective responses among organisations on the island. One of the upcoming joint priorities will be to advocate for improved and faster access to medical care, an issue increasingly raised by the people we support.

During the same period, we also contributed to [a joint submission with HRLP](#) to the **Universal Periodic Review** process. The submission, due in April, focuses on detention practices within the CCAC, with particular attention to unaccompanied minors, drawing on data collected between 2023 and 2025, as well as first-hand field documentation. Given the word limit for joint submissions, key case examples were carefully selected to ensure both accuracy and representativeness.

We remain committed to continuing these advocacy efforts, strengthening collaboration with partners, and ensuring that documented field realities are consistently brought to the attention of national and European stakeholders.

To read more in details about these advocacy effort, feel free to consult [linktree](#) where updates and full statements are regularly posted.

TEAM UPDATES

The last quarter of 2025 brought important transitions for the team.

We said **goodbye to Natalia**, one of our Greek lawyers, who had been part of the Samos Legal Centre for the past three years and a half. Natalia first joined the project as a caseworker and, after obtaining her legal license, continued her journey with us as a lawyer. Throughout her time here, she demonstrated dedication and professionalism, supporting countless individuals through complex legal procedures. We were very happy to learn that she will continue her path with another legal organization on Lesbos, and we wish her all the very best in this new chapter!

At the beginning of 2026, we **also said farewell to Lucile**, the former Project Manager for one and a half years. Before taking on this role, she had already contributed to the organization in a different position as a legal officer, gaining deep knowledge of the project and its challenges. Her time as Project Manager coincided with a particularly demanding period marked by budgetary constraints and structural changes. We are especially grateful for her commitment during her final months, when resources were limited and the team was significantly reduced. Despite these challenges, she continued to give her full energy to ensure that activities could continue and that the project remained operational!

After leaving the project, Lucile began a new role as Project Manager with another organization present on Samos, with whom we collaborate. We are very glad to continue crossing paths and to still have her as part of the wider community working on the island.

During the final months of 2025, Lucile worked closely with **Dimitra**, one of our Greek lawyers who continues to be part of the team today. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Dimitra for her dedication and tireless work during this demanding period, when maintaining services required exceptional effort and resilience!

Thanks to their combined efforts, the project successfully transitioned into a new phase!



At the **beginning 2026**, a new team composition of four members was established. We were pleased to welcome back **Mercedes as Project Manager**. Having previously worked with the project in two different roles, her return has brought valuable experience and continuity to the team.

At the same time, we **welcomed two new caseworkers, Eloïse and Yasmine**, whose enthusiasm and commitment have brought fresh energy to the project. During their first months, they have shown strong engagement and adaptability, integrating quickly into the complex legal realities of asylum work on the Greek islands.

SUPPORT THE PROJECT

A HEARTFELT THANK YOU – AND A CALL TO KEEP GOING TOGETHER

First and foremost: **THANK YOU VERY MUCH!!**

Whether you've been following us since the early days or just recently joined our community, your support and encouragement mean the world to us. This project has only been possible because of the solidarity and trust of people like you, who believe (like we do) that everyone deserves dignity, information, and access to their rights !

Today, we face a new chapter. Resources are shrinking, needs are growing, and we are doing our best to adapt. To keep going, we have launched a fundraising campaign on **HelloAsso**. This campaign is not just about covering immediate costs; it's about building the foundation that will carry us into the future.

If you can, we invite you to support us once more:

- by making a contribution, no matter the size,
- by sharing the campaign with friends, colleagues, or networks who may want to help,
- or simply by staying connected and spreading the word.

Every gesture makes a difference. Together, we can ensure that this project continues to stand by those who need it most.

Thank you for walking this path with us.

**Support the Samos
Legal Centre Project !**



Direct link to our
Fundraising campaign

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