

AUGUST 2022

THE SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the 11th edition of the Samos Legal Centre newsletter!

August saw the highest number of new arrivals reaching Zervou refugee camp in any month of 2021 and 2022, with 317 new arrivals being registered. Read more about how the team adapted to this influx below.

Case story



Over the summer months, the ASF France team invested considerable time in supporting Z* with his asylum procedures. Originally from Syria, Z* had first arrived in Samos in 2019, crossing by boat from Turkey. As a Syrian arriving on the Greek border islands, he was subject to an admissibility procedure under the EU-Turkey Statement and required in his asylum interview to demonstrate that Turkey was not a safe country for him to live and seek asylum. He was rejected, appealed this decision, and was rejected again.

Z* continued to live in Vathy camp two years, subject to a geographical restriction but with few legal options left. He lived in a tent in extremely challenging conditions, with his mental health deteriorating significantly. In September 2021, the old camp closed. Z* feared being deported to Turkey as rumours about the new 'detention camp' in Zervou circulated amongst camp residents. He chose to live outside the new facility, and remained unhoused and undocumented for almost one year. Finally, he contacted the Samos Legal Centre for help with re-starting his procedures and re-accessing accommodation. After two months advocating on his behalf, ASF France succeeded in lodging his new asylum request. He finally had an opportunity to be interviewed about Syria and the danger he faced there, 3 years after arriving in Greece.

In August, after almost one year living unhoused, Z* was provided with accommodation by the Greek state. He is now waiting for a final decision on his asylum application. Read more about his case here:
<https://www.facebook.com/LegalCentreSamos/photos/pcb.1108550550088821/108549596755583/>

Arrival quarantine



As the number of new arrivals to Samos increased over the summer, the quarantine area in the camp reached capacity. During their time in quarantine, which lasts a minimum of 5 days and is not generally a requirement for people travelling to Greece, applicants do not have access to legal information. Some ASF France beneficiaries have reported having no change of clothing during their time in quarantine, relying on the clothing distributions by NGOs if they arrive in wet or damaged clothes after their journeys by boat.

Upon exit from quarantine, they are quickly registered by the police and the asylum service. Some have their main asylum interview within 1 or 2 weeks of exiting quarantine. This leaves asylum seekers with little time to assimilate to their new surroundings, seek independent legal support, and prepare to present their claims for international protection. Owing to the speed of the 'fast-track' border procedure on Samos, applicants can receive a decision on their asylum application within 1-2 months of their arrival in Greece.

ASF France continues to raise its concerns that the manner in which the 'fast-track' procedure operates risks undermining procedural safeguards and leaves little time for applicants to prepare and understand the procedure. This is particularly the case when asylum seekers have experienced trauma and consequently have difficulties detailing the danger they face in their country.

Increasing arrivals + speed of the procedure

In August, to increase its capacity to schedule many asylum interviews quickly, and determine who should receive international protection or not, the Greek Asylum Service began conducting interviews remotely, with online interpreters and/or remote interviewers. The ASF France team has been collecting feedback from its beneficiaries, and attending at interviews, to understand the impact of these changes and the additional challenges faced by applicants.

"We tried for one hour but the interpreter could not hear us and we couldn't hear him. Finally they agreed to postpone the interview. I was really stressed. And if my lawyer hadn't been there, I think they would have tried to continue the interview with that bad interpreter." - A

"It was horrible. They did the interview with a laptop. The interviewer wasn't there, he was on the laptop and he was rushing me. He only wanted short answers to everything, for me to answer yes or no." - I

"I was really stressed because I was alone in the room, with that laptop computer. And the internet connection was bad. They were rushing me so I felt really stressed." - M

ASF France has raised its concerns about remote preparations and the speed of the legal procedure to the Asylum authorities and the UNHCR. The team is committed to attending at interviews as much as possible and ensuring applicants are informed and prepared for the possibility of their asylum interviews taking place remotely.



271

The number of the month

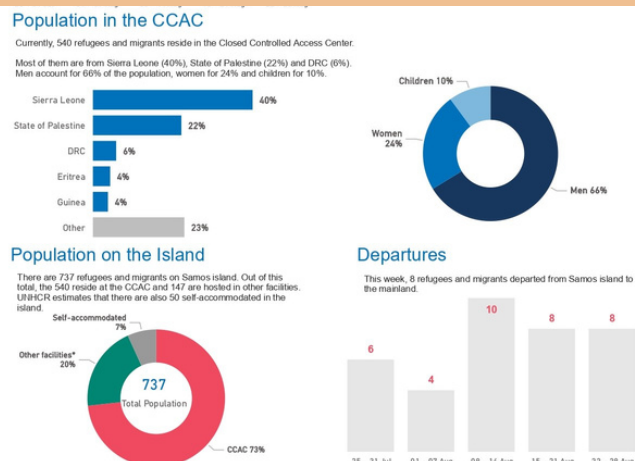
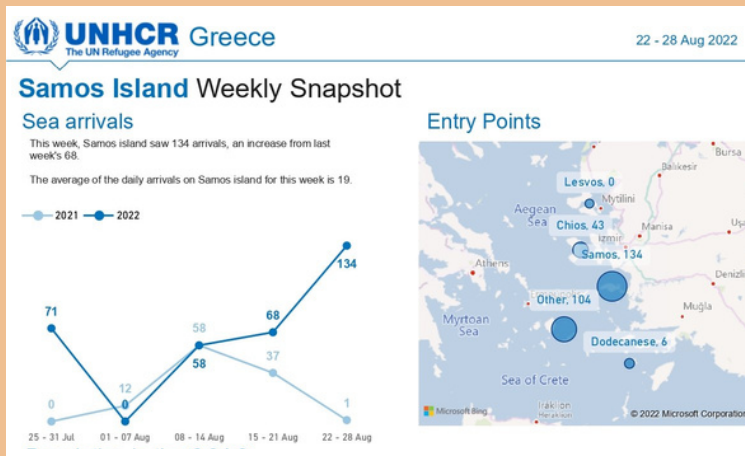
317 new arrivals were registered as arriving in Samos in August, 192 more than the previous month and the highest number of new arrivals in a single month in 2022 and in 2021.

The Legal Centre team conducted 271 consultations during August, welcoming 65 new beneficiaries (45 men, 20 women). As the asylum procedure continued at rapid speed, the team concentrated its efforts on ensuring as many people as possible were informed of their rights and prepared for their interviews. 75 preparation consultations were carried out for 59 asylum seekers (20 women and 39 men), and 9 people were accompanied at their interviews by an ASF France lawyer. The lawyer attending ensured that their right were respected and that due process was followed during the interview.

Additionally in August, 2 cases were litigated by ASF France before the European Court of Human Rights. These detailed submissions, drafted by ASF France volunteers supporting the field team remotely, argue that the conditions in Samos camp in 2020 violated the human rights of the applicants affected. An answer from the Court is now pending.



Population data



The UNHCR population snapshots for Samos estimate that 540 migrants and refugees live in the CCAC in Zervou, but that there are 737 refugees and migrants on Samos island in total, of which 147 are hosted in other facilities and approximately 50 are self-accommodated.

The figures also note that of the current population, the majority come from Sierra Leone and Palestine. Men account for 66% of the population, women for 24% and children for 10%.

