

# THE SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER



*Welcome to the 12th edition of the Samos Legal Centre newsletter ! As arrivals to the island continued to increase this month, the team in Samos organised group legal information sessions to inform applicants of their rights and prepare them for their procedures. September marked one year since the inauguration of the 'Closed-Controlled Access Centre' in Samos, and our team continued to gather feedback and testimonies from beneficiaries. Read about it below.*

## Success story- M\* from Sudan



M\* first contacted the Legal Centre in January to request interview preparation support. His was one of the first cases from Sudan seen in Samos in 2022.

An ASF France lawyer attended at his interview and highlighted his lack of ID documents from Sudan, supporting a claim of statelessness. The Greek asylum service called M\* back for a further interview to ask additional questions about his birth and ID documents. In September, M\* received refugee status from Greece.

"I didn't know what to say at my very first interview. But after we met and started talking about my case, and I told you my story, I felt much better. I was ready for everything and my interview went well. My life in the camp was like a prison, it was difficult. But after I met more people, I made friends and I had my simple life which was a bit better. When I took my decision, I was so happy that I cannot explain my feelings with words!"

M\*'s case highlights the importance of legal aid prior to, and during, the asylum interview. Through interview preparations, essential information which could be missed or overlooked by the Asylum Service is identified, and beneficiaries are guided to present information in the clearest way during the interview.

## 1-year of the Closed-Controlled Access Centre in Samos

September marked one year since the inauguration of the new facility in Samos. Funded by the EU at a cost of €43 million, the CCAC was intended to replace the overcrowded Vathy refugee camp. At the time of its opening, approximately 300 people were transferred there. Today, the Centre's population has reached over 1000, as the number of asylum seekers reaching Samos continues to grow.



In the past year, ensuring that legal aid remained visible and accessible to asylum seekers has proven challenging. The ASF France team committed to providing independent legal support from its office outside the facility. However, the rules on who could exit and re-enter the 'Closed-Controlled' centre changed considerably throughout the year. 'Drop-by' appointments and consultations became a thing of the past as beneficiaries struggled to access in-person legal support before their asylum interviews, which take place at record speed. With no state-provided legal aid available for new arrivals, the ASF France team adapted to more frequent remote consultations and audio guides to ensure applicants were informed of their rights and prepared for interviews.

Despite the improvement of material living conditions, feedback from asylum seekers in Samos has highlighted the psychological impact that the remote location of the new facility has had on residents.

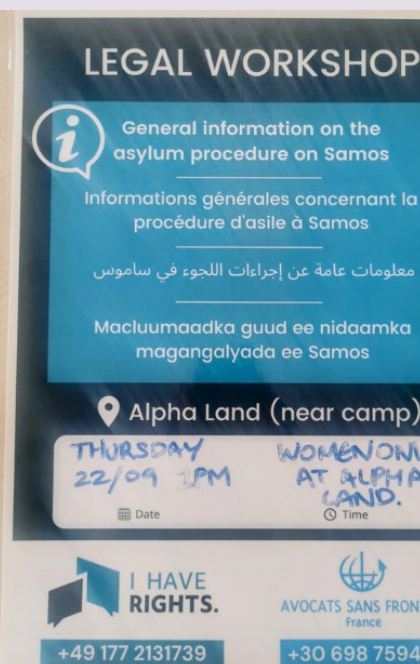
*"The living conditions are better, I have a bed now. But it has affected me psychologically, as a person who feels that he is in a prison that is not allowed to leave or enter, and this way of thinking is slowly killing me." - A*

*There are many things that I cannot do now. I need to walk in the open. I am a human being." - M*

## Workshops

Group information sessions are an effective way of informing groups of asylum seekers about their rights and the steps in their legal procedures.

In partnership with I Have Rights, and the Human Rights Legal Project, ASF France conducted two group information sessions in September, where the 32 attendees received key legal information and had the opportunity to ask important questions about their asylum procedure, in a safe and supportive environment. Additionally workshops are planned for October and in the coming months.





## 54 The number of the month

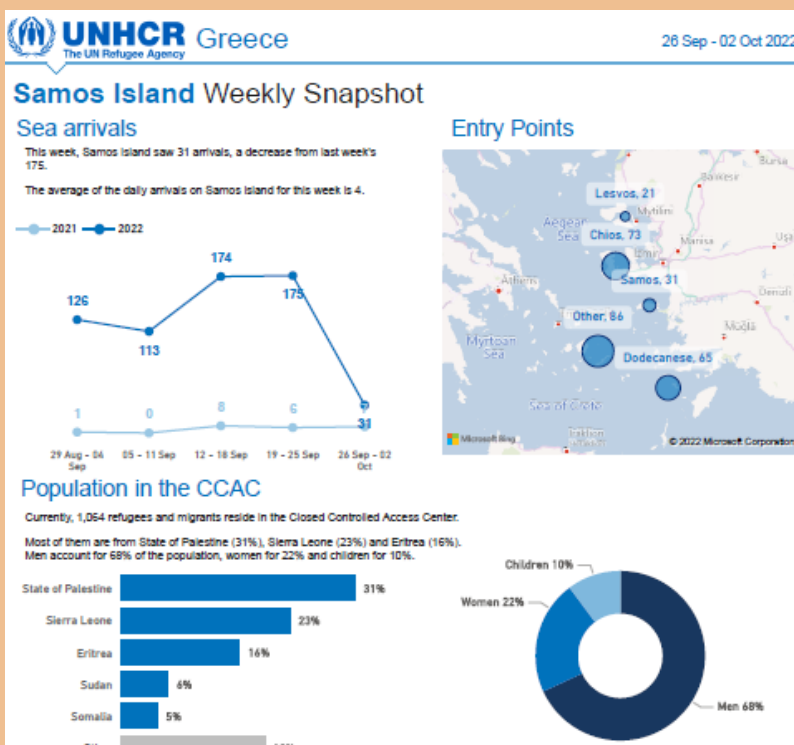
68 new beneficiaries were welcomed to the Samos Legal Centre in September. Registered arrivals to the island reached a record high, with 546 new asylum seekers being registered in Zervou CCAC. The team worked at full capacity to ensure as many applicants as possible were informed of their rights and the steps in the asylum procedure.

155 sessions were conducted to manage the asylum requests of beneficiaries, and 54 interview preparations were carried out by phone and in person for 44 asylum seekers. The two ASF France lawyers represented at 7 interviews, lasting 4-6 hours each, and submitted 4 legal statements to strengthen the cases of vulnerable beneficiaries.

In total, 326 consultations were carried out this month.



## Population data



The UNHCR population snapshots for Samos estimate that 1054 migrants and refugees live in the CCAC in Zervou.

The figures also note that of the current population, the majority come from Palestine and Sierra Leone. Men account for 68% of the population, women for 22% and children for 10%. In September alone, 546 new arrivals reached Samos, but the authorities commenced transferring applicants after their interviews, to maintain the CCAC population at just over 50%.

