

THE SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the 15th edition of the Samos Legal Centre newsletter! As the end of the year approached, the Samos Legal Centre team remained busy, welcoming 30 new beneficiaries for legal advice and interview preparation. The team bid farewell to one of its long-time Greek lawyers, and continued to advocate to the authorities for the respect of fundamental human rights, petitioning the Minister for Asylum and Migration this month. Read more below!

Internet access for camp residents infringing upon exercising fundamental right to legal aid



In late November, the camp manager in Samos announced upcoming changes to Wi-Fi access in the Closed-Controlled Access Centre, advising that from January 2023, residents would require their asylum seeker card information in order to access the Wi-Fi. In practice, this would mean that new arrivals who were waiting to receive their registration documents would no longer have access to the internet, potentially for up to 25 days after arriving. ASF France and its partner organisation I HAVE RIGHTS immediately wrote to both the Minister for Migration and Asylum, and the CCAC Camp Director, highlighting the inevitable impact on applicants' ability to exercise their right to legal aid and representation if they had no practical means of contacting legal aid actors. The letter further highlighted how many applicants were called for interviews before receiving their asylum seeker cards. If the changes took place, this would mean that these applicants would have no means of contacting legal support prior to asylum interviews if they were not permitted Wi-Fi access during this period, given that no legal aid for interview preparation is provided within the facility.

On 16th December, this letter was adapted and 9 additional organisations (Choose Love, Europe Must Act, Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), Mare Liberum, Mobile Info Team Refugees, International Refugee Legal Support, Samos Volunteers, and Yoga and Sport With Refugees) joined in signing an open letter, calling for the Ministry to abandon its plan to restrict internet access. A response has not been received to either letter at the time of reporting, and as of January 4th, Wi-Fi continued to be accessible to new arrivals.

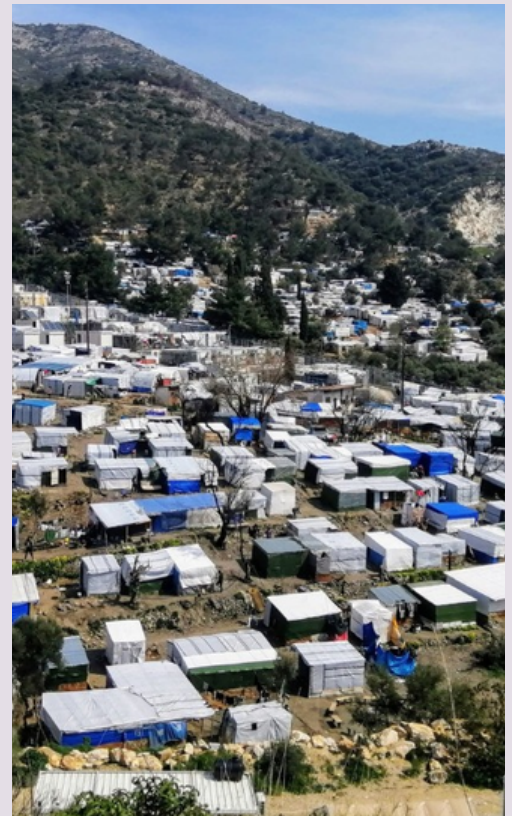
End of year success stories



In December, the consistently high number of transfers of beneficiaries from Samos to facilities on the mainland continued to impact the team's ability to collect feedback about decisions and results. In December alone, more than 15 ASF France beneficiaries reported having been transferred to the mainland. Despite repeated requests to stay in touch, contact was lost with a further 11 applicants this month. Nevertheless, positive decisions were received by 5 beneficiaries, including H*, A* and N*.

H* first contacted the Legal Centre in September for interview preparation support. Upon arrival in Samos, his boat had crashed upon rocks and several passengers had drowned, leaving H* in psychological distress. Despite this, he recounted in great detail the persecution he had faced in his country as a member of the opposing political party, and as a human rights defender. Immediately prior to fleeing, he had been kept in captivity and tortured repeatedly. Over two appointments, the ASF France team prepared him to present his claim to the asylum service, and after a 3 month wait, he was granted international protection by Greece.

H* said: *"The interview went well. The waiting was very hard, because I couldn't work or do anything to distract myself. And I was still in pain, so I was happy when they finally transferred me from Samos, and it helped a lot that you gave me contact information for lawyers where I am now. I'm thankful for the support, it helped me understand exactly what the interview would be like, because the preparation matched the interview questions."*



203 The number of the month

203 consultations were conducted in the Samos Legal Centre during December, an increase of 19 compared to the previous month. This highlighted a consistent level of activity at the Centre despite the slower winter months.

30 new beneficiaries were welcomed for legal support and 16 interview preparations were conducted. 85 case management sessions were carried out for ongoing files, and the lawyers sent 35 requests to the authorities on behalf of vulnerable beneficiaries.

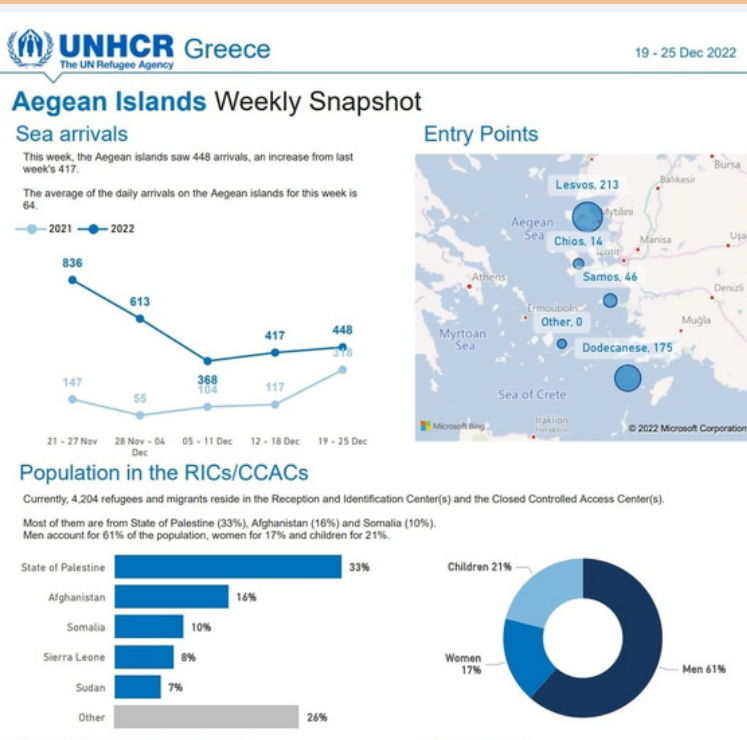


Population data

The latest figures from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum state that 1013 asylum seekers currently reside in the CCAC. Over 155 new arrivals were registered in Samos by 22nd December and more than 106 people had been transferred from Samos to facilities on the mainland.

UNHCR figures from December 19-25th estimate that 46% of the camp population originate from the State of Palestine, 18% from Sierra Leone, 8% from Eritrea, 6% from Sudan, 4% from Somalia and 18% from 'Other' unspecified countries.

It stated that men account for 75% of the population, women for 11% and children for 14%.



Departure from the team !

In December, the Samos Legal Centre team bid farewell to Panagiota Karanika, who had represented numerous beneficiaries throughout their legal procedures as one of the team's Greek lawyers since March 2021. ASF France remains extremely grateful for her commitment to her beneficiaries and her team spirit, and wishes her the very best of luck with her future endeavours!



The Samos Legal Centre team wishes its partners and donors a very peaceful and happy new year, and conveys its immense gratitude for the ongoing support and solidarity in 2022 and into the new year.

