

JANUARY 2023

THE SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the 16th edition of the Samos Legal Centre Newsletter! January 2023 represented the busiest winter month for the Legal Centre in the past two years, with 253 new arrivals to the island, and 89 new beneficiaries received at the Legal Centre. Read the latest updates from the team below!

NGOs barred from operating in the Samos CCAC

From 1st January 2023, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum declared that staff of NGOs would no longer be able to work inside refugee camps in Greece, unless they had fulfilled specific registration criteria. These measures applied to camps on the border islands, as well as on the mainland. Overnight, NGO staff and volunteers in Samos were blocked from entering the CCAC. Most had not managed to fulfil these registration requirements, which include providing a Greek tax number, Greek criminal record clearance, CV and fingerprints to the authorities. Additionally, the registration process is subject to long administrative delays lasting more than one year. These measures have resulted in all recreational and educational activities, as well as primary healthcare, ceasing in the camp in Samos.

On 23rd January, MSF negotiated space in the car park outside the CCAC to operate its mobile clinic, but there remains no doctor inside the facility for over 1000 asylum seekers.


ASF France confirmed that Greek registered lawyers would not be required to fulfil these registration conditions, and could maintain their independence by simply providing a Power of Attorney to accompany beneficiaries at asylum interviews. Serious concerns have been raised about the extensive impact of these measures on the psychological and physical well-being of residents, as well as the transparency of procedures inside the facility.



Continued delays in issuance of Greek ID cards and travel documents

In September 2022, ASF France joined 14 organisations in writing to the Minister of Migration and Asylum about the risk of homelessness for recognised refugees in Samos, due to administrative delays. The situation has since deteriorated drastically, with refugees now waiting 6 months to start the process to receive their Greek ID card, needed for accessing social benefits, the housing and job market. In the meantime, they are forced into homelessness and poverty in Samos, as they lose their accommodation in the CCAC 30 days after receiving their positive decision.

This month, ASF France contributed to providing an updated letter to the Ministry to highlight the urgent need to ensure people can obtain post-recognition documents in a timely manner.

 [Read the full letter here](#)



Good news story



This month, 'L' and 'S,' a couple, received refugee status. Originally from Yemen, 'L' had escaped forced recruitment from the Houthi rebel movement and fled to Djibouti for safety. There he met 'S', who was escaping from a forced marriage, FGM and domestic violence at the hands of her husband and brother. The couple left Djibouti with their child, and sought international protection in Greece. They were accompanied at their interviews by an ASF France lawyer, who highlighted their traumatic past experiences and severe medical conditions. During the interview, their lawyer flagged the poor quality of the interpretation and ensured due process was followed. The couple were transferred to Athens for additional medical care, and ASF France stayed in contact with them. This month, they learned that they had received refugee status in Greece.

"We finally have very good news. We were accepted yesterday, we just received the decision in our gmail! We are all fine here, safe together. Thank you very much for your help again!" - S

89 The number of the month

89 new beneficiaries (64 men and 25 women) were welcomed at the Samos Legal Centre in January, a significant increase of 63 compared to the same month of the previous year.

Two new caseworkers and a junior Greek lawyer joined the team this month, and together with the senior lawyer and project manager, 201 consultations were carried out in total.

The team conducted 60 interview preparations, racing against the fast-track border procedure to ensure applicants were adequately prepared and informed of their rights before their substantive asylum interviews.

Cases from the previous year were followed up, and 39 case management sessions were conducted.



Population data

The latest figures state that around 1012 asylum seekers reside in the Closed- Controlled Access Centre. UNHCR figures show how 253 new arrivals were registered in Samos in January, compared to just 15 in January 2022 and 0 in January 2021. At least 89 people were transferred from Samos to facilities on the mainland this month.

UNHCR figures estimate that:

- 41% of the camp population originate from the State of Palestine;
- 20% from Sierra Leone;
- 11% from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ;
- 4% from Sudan;
- 3% from Guinea
- 20% from 'Other' unspecified countries.

It stated that men account for 69% of the population, women for 15% and children for 16%

