

MARCH 2023

# THE SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the 18th edition of the Samos Legal Centre Newsletter! March saw continued restrictions on NGOs operating in the 'Closed-Controlled Access Centre,' including restrictions on legal representatives. Read about the Samos Legal Centre's advocacy efforts, a good news story, a team member introduction and context updates below!

## Meet the team-Anaïs, ASF France caseworker

In January, Anaïs joined the Samos team as a legal expert volunteer caseworker. Having recently passed the French bar exam, and with prior experience working with refugees in legal aid clinics, she has significantly strengthened the capacities and expertise of the team in Samos. Here she tells us about her experiences so far:

*I felt a strong need to use the theoretical knowledge I had acquired during my studies to help people on the ground and have an impact. Joining the ASF Legal Centre on Samos is a very concrete way to participate in the defense of the rights of people on the move and ensure that, in the middle of the chaos caused by European policies, they at least have access to free legal aid to be informed about their rights.*



*Being in contact with beneficiaries and building a relationship of trust and mutual respect is what I enjoy most. Providing free legal aid is not just about giving legal advice, it is also about legal empowerment. When we prepare asylum seekers for their interviews, we try to give them the tools to speak up for themselves, which is not always easy, especially for people who had been victims of very traumatic events and who never had a voice before.*

→ [Read the full interview here](#)

## ASF France advocacy success- Palestinian refugee from Syria recognised as stateless

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Direct advocacy to the Greek asylum authorities is a key aspect of the Samos Legal Centre's work. The lack of capacity and knowledge, coupled with the demands on the Asylum service, result in many administrative errors being made. These mistakes can seriously impact an applicant's life. H\*'s case highlights the positive impact of our advocacy.

H\* first contacted the Legal Centre last November, in a state of extreme distress. At just 18 years old, he had been registered upon arrival in Samos as having Syrian nationality. He was due to undergo an 'admissibility' interview about Türkiye, like all Syrians arriving at the Greek border islands, to identify if Türkiye could be considered safe for him.

H\* explained that although he had been born and lived all his life in Syria, he was actually Palestinian. He had only known life in a refugee camp, and had lost both of his parents during the war in Syria.



An ASF France lawyer attended at his 'admissibility' interview and argued that as a Palestinian, H\* should only be interviewed about his own country and not about Türkiye. She highlighted that he had no connection to Türkiye, a country he had only briefly transited through. She insisted that H\* had never received international protection or Syrian nationality, and should be considered as 'stateless' and deserving of international protection.

H\* had an additional interview in February, supported again by ASF France. During this period of uncertainty, his mental health began to decline significantly, and he was referred to Médecins sans Frontières for psychological support. Finally, this month, the Greek Asylum Service changed his registration information and recognised him as a Palestinian refugee. He received international protection for 3 years.

## Feedback from ASF France beneficiary- recognised refugee

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This month, B\* received refugee status in Samos! Here she explains in her own words about the asylum interview process:

"I'd never had an interview in my life, so I didn't know how to go about it. I didn't have the words or even an idea of where to start. I'd never met a lawyer either! So I was a bit scared, but when I came to meet you, I let myself go and opened up. Normally I don't open up easily but the preparation went well, and I felt reassured.

The interview itself was still very scary. But when fear came over me, I remembered your advice and this chased the fear away! And that's what gave me the strength to express myself and say what happened. And it even gave me the strength not to forget, because normally, when I panic, I forget everything! But I remembered our preparation, and a small voice told me "you forgot something" and then I remembered. In fact, you weren't there in the interview but it was like you were present, it's hard to explain.

When I was told that my decision was positive, the emotions were all mixed up - it was like a surprise for me in fact!

Now I'm going to devote my time to my daughter, because she is just a baby. Afterwards, I will look for a small job to take care of my daughter and myself. For the moment, I plan to stay in Athens, but maybe that will change, I don't know."

ASF France remains committed to empowering applicants by informing them of their rights and providing free legal aid and representation in Samos.



## Context updates

### **Continued restrictions on NGOs accessing Closed- Controlled Access Centre**

The Samos Legal Centre's lawyers submitted a complaint to the Greek Ombudsman this month, highlighting several examples of times that legal representatives were required to follow procedures that had no legal basis in order to access the CCAC and represent their beneficiaries. Lawyers in Samos are requested to hand over their personal ID documents for the duration of their visits in the camp, are frequently escorted around the facility by security, and are required to follow internal procedures that are in violation of national law. These procedures cause significant delays, risk applicants being deprived of legal representation and cause psychological distress to representatives. It is hoped that pressure from the Ombudsman, an independent investigative authority, will result in this practice being abandoned by the camp management.

Additionally, for a further month, staff of NGOs who had not completed the required registration procedures with the Ministry were unable to enter the CCAC. No educational, recreational or primary healthcare was provided inside the facility for a further month.



## Lack of interpreters blocking access to services

In March, the UNHCR advised that the contracts of the European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA) interpreters assigned to work in Samos had expired and were not going to be renewed, resulting in there being a significant shortage of interpreters in the CCAC. Many asylum interviews were postponed indefinitely throughout the month. ASF France beneficiaries reported being unable to speak to the camp nurse or psychologist, request information about their asylum files, or communicate with the authorities owing to the lack of interpreters. Significant pressure and mounting tension were reported inside the camp, and protests were staged by camp residents on 16th and 17th March. No information had been provided at the time of reporting regarding plans to reemploy and increase the departed staff.



## 76 Number of the month

76 case management consultations were carried out by the Samos Legal Centre in March. The team's caseworkers keep in touch with all beneficiaries, even those who have been transferred to the mainland from Samos. This ensures that applicants understand developments with their complex legal procedures and can ask questions and have a point of contact with legal advisors. 226 consultations were conducted in total and the team welcomed 32 new asylum seekers for legal advice. 59 interview preparations, lasting approximately 2 hours each, were carried out. 45 requests were sent to the Asylum service and camp management to advocate for applicants,.



*This month, at least 8 beneficiaries received refugee status in Samos!*