

JUNE 2023

THE SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the 21st edition of the Samos Legal Centre newsletter. In June, a devastating shipwreck occurred off the Greek coast, one week before the national parliamentary elections. Access to asylum on mainland Greece continued to be virtually non-existent, leaving applicants unable to lodge their asylum requests. In Samos, the ASF France team celebrated LGBTQIA+ Pride Month, and raced to prepare applicants ahead of their asylum interviews. Read more below:

Context updates

Devastating shipwreck off Greek coast

On 14th June, a ship carrying between 400-700 migrants capsized and sank off the western coast of Greece. The Greek authorities confirmed 78 deaths and said 104 survivors – mostly from Syria, Egypt and Pakistan – had been brought ashore. Police reported as many as 500 missing, with witnesses saying up to 100 children were in the ship's hold. Reporting around the incident called into question the actions of Greek authorities, as testimonies from survivors and accusations of negligence and even direct responsibility emerged against the Greek coast guard. Attention was also briefly focused on Greece's strict migration policy in international media.

Nine survivors of Egyptian origin were quickly charged with participation in a criminal organization, manslaughter and causing a shipwreck. 3 days of national mourning were announced, and protests took place across the country, including in Samos on 15th June at the main square. However, in the run-up to the Greek parliamentary elections, national media continued to focus on domestic economic issues.



Greek parliamentary elections, second round

National parliamentary elections took place in Greece on June 25th. Greece's conservative New Democracy party won a landslide victory with just over 40% of the vote, to form a government for a second four-year term. Three far-right parties were additionally elected into government, leaving just one left party in government

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Continued shutdown of operations at the Asylum Service

In June, for a further month, the national asylum service in Greece no longer had access to its internal system of files owing to a scheduled overhauling of its internal server. Although asylum interviews continued to take place and some emails were responded to, the asylum service could not register any new asylum applications, deliver folders to legal representatives, nor issue positive or negative asylum decisions.

In Samos, this shutdown meant that 81 new arrivals could not register their asylum requests, and were left in 'de facto' detention for more than one week. Between June 7th -23rd there was a brief return to operations, whereby a flood of documents and decisions were issued, and legal actors were quickly overwhelmed, before the system stopped again.

ASF France joined five legal organisations in Greece in calling for immediate restoration of all asylum procedures in Greece, to ensure the right to claim asylum is ensured and applicants are not left in legal limbo. Read the full statement [here](#):



SAMOS Legal Centre Activities

LGBTQIA+ Pride month

In honour of Pride Month, a time to celebrate the impact that LGBTQIA+ individuals have had on history and their continued struggle for civil rights and equal justice, ASF France focused on amplifying the voices of beneficiaries who have navigated the complex asylum procedure in Samos as LGBTQIA+ individuals. Their testimonies highlighted the unique difficulties experienced by this community and the need to create safe spaces for vulnerable groups.

I can't imagine my life in Greece yet, because in this refugee camp I don't feel safe. I've been here for 5 months but I cannot express who I am, so I'm still hiding my identity like before. I'm waiting for my decision and that is very stressful. I hope they will believe me because I can never go back to my country." - S from Uganda.

"When I met the lawyers I felt safe, because I was speaking to you like woman to woman, and I could see you believed me. But in the camp there is no support for LGBT people, it is only from the organisations outside. In the camp, I just hide my identify and don't speak to anybody. Meeting you helped me a lot, because I was more comfortable in the asylum interview and felt confident to tell my story. I'm still waiting to know what will happen next." - K from Uganda

Read more [here](#).



Good news story

This month, the Samos Legal Centre team celebrated as M* is from Syria finally received international protection from Greece. M* had walked into the Legal Centre last year for help, after several weeks living unhoused in Samos town. He did not have a single document to confirm his name, nationality or date of birth. Although he recalled having an asylum interview before being released from detention, he did not know what had happened to his case.

An ASF France lawyer set about establishing his legal status, spending months liaising between the Greek police, court service and asylum authorities. After two months, it was finally confirmed that his asylum interview had taken place and that the decision was ready but could not be issued because of a misunderstanding from the criminal court authorities. ASF France spent a further six months advocating to this authority to release his decision. Finally, this month, after 8 months living unhoused in Samos, M* received refugee status from Greece.

M*'s case highlights the importance of legal aid when dealing with complex, long and slow procedures involving multiple authorities. He is now waiting to receive his Greek ID card and to finally move forward with his life in Greece.



29

Number of the month

29 external referrals were sent by the ASF France team to its partners in Samos this month. These referrals aim to ensure that applicants' non-legal needs are met, and to provide a holistic and joined-up support to people on the move. This month, these referrals concerned requests for psychological support, for additional primary healthcare, and to flag protection concerns to the UNHCR and the authorities.

In total, 271 consultations were carried out in June, and 29 new beneficiaries (18 men and 11 women) were welcomed to the Legal Centre. 35 interview preparation appointments were conducted, in addition to 9 appeal sessions. The ASF France lawyers submitted 42 requests to the authorities to advocate for applicants, and 101 case management sessions were carried out.

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

