

JULY 2023

# THE SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the 22nd edition of the Samos Legal Centre newsletter!

*In July, international media continued to focus on Greece following the devastating shipwreck off the Greek coast the previous month. The number of new arrivals managing to register their asylum claims in Samos increased significantly, and the team delivered presentations about the legal procedure in Samos to visitors on the island. Read more below:*

## Spotlight on Greece following devastating shipwreck off Greek coast- charges brought against NGOs

Following the devastating shipwreck off the western coast of Greece on 14th June, international media attention remained on Greece and its alleged involvement in the tragedy. The Guardian reported how multiple survivors had said that attempts by the Greek coastguard to tow the vessel had ultimately caused the sinking. In July, the increased number of arrivals managing to register on the border islands without being pushed back was speculated by organisations as a potential attempt by Greece to show a softer approach, even temporarily. 664 new arrivals were registered on Lesbos alone in July, with the population of the camp there reaching 2749 persons.



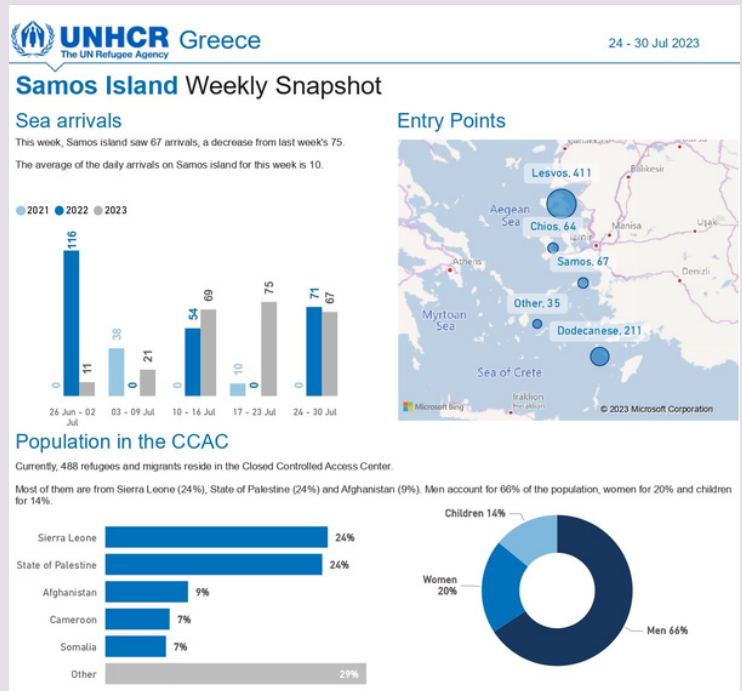
However, on 29 July, The Civil Protection Ministry for the Police published a statement that charges of 'facilitating the illegal entry of foreigners into Greek territory, through the island of Lesbos' had been brought against members of 'two criminal organizations' active on Lesbos.<sup>5</sup> Although the organisations have not been named in the statement, they are identified as working inside the camp in Lesbos, and accused of having provided instructions about the navigation of the arriving boats, provided information to the traffickers about their arrivals, and encouraged the traffickers by gathering and providing instructions to the arriving persons who were hiding in forested areas that were difficult to reach. This move highlights the ongoing efforts in Greece to identify potential smuggling routes while targeting civil society actors involved in supporting people on the move.

## Samos 'Closed-Controlled Access Centre' context updates

The latest figures from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum state that 599 asylum seekers and refugees live in Samos, with 587 residing in the CCAC. At least 211 new arrivals were registered in Samos in July, compared to last month's 29, and more than 93 people were transferred from the island to facilities on the mainland, while others left by illegal means.

UNHCR figures from 24-30 July estimated that:

- 24% of the camp population originate from Sierra Leone;
- 24% from Palestine;
- 9% from Afghanistan;
- 6% from Cameroon, 7% Somalia;
- 29% from 'Other' unspecified countries.
- It stated that men account for 66% of the population, women for 20% and children for 14%.



## Testimonial- support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence

Approximately one third of the Samos Legal Centre's beneficiaries are female-identifying, and the majority report having suffered sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in their countries, or on their journeys to seek asylum in Greece.

Female asylum seekers are particularly at risk, not only throughout their journeys, where the risk of human trafficking and SGBV is high, but in the reception country. They have specific protection needs which require both [#LegalAid](#) and asylum procedures to be gender-sensitive and individual, as the risk of secondary victimization can be high when applicants have to recall and describe painful details of their stories. In Samos, female asylum seekers regularly report feeling 'rushed', and 'pressured' during the interview, and given inadequate time to express themselves.

S, from Uganda, is a survivor of a forced marriage and years of domestic violence. The violence in her marriage was so extensive that it resulted in several miscarriages and long-term injuries. S\* sought out the protection of the national authorities in Uganda but was informed that "the police would not get involved in family issues." In Uganda, SGBV is widespread, and forced marriages are widely reported. The national law does not criminalize marital rape, a prevalent feature of forced marriages.

After several unsuccessful attempts to relocate within her country, S\* managed to flee to Turkey and eventually to Greece to seek asylum. She met the ASF France team, and over three sessions, was guided to recount the painful aspects of her story and prepare for the asylum interview. She was represented at her interview by an ASF France lawyer, who ensured that the questions asked were gender-sensitive and minimized her risk of retraumatization.

This month, S\* received [#refugeestatus](#) in Samos.



## Presentation of Samos Legal Centre

This month, the ASF France team had the opportunity to meet with Antonis Schwarz, a Greek-German activist and philanthropist, who has supported the Samos project through his 'Good Move Initiatives' for several years.

The team discussed the changes in the context in Samos in relation to Greece's migration policies of deterrence and detainment, the impact of these policies on asylum seekers and refugees arriving to the island, and the legal support provided by ASF France. Read more [here!](#)



**271**

### Number of the month

271 consultations were conducted in the Samos Legal Centre during July, as the number of new arrivals registered at the Closed-Controlled Access Centre continued to grow.

New arrivals reached out for legal support, and 31 interview preparation appointments (lasting approximately two hours each) were carried out.

32 new beneficiaries were welcomed at the Centre, and 137 sessions to manage ongoing cases were delivered. The team's two Greek lawyers sent 54 requests to the asylum and camp management authorities to advocate on behalf of vulnerable applicants, attended at 5 asylum interviews and submitted 5 appeals.

