

THE SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER



*Welcome to the 23rd edition of the Samos Legal Centre newsletter. August 2023 saw the highest number of newly arrived asylum seekers being brought to the Samos 'Closed- Controlled Access Centre' since 2019, with **1236 new arrivals** this month.*

As the authorities struggled to manage this increase, conditions in the CCAC deteriorated significantly. Read more below!

Context Updates : Rapid increase in arrivals to Greek border islands



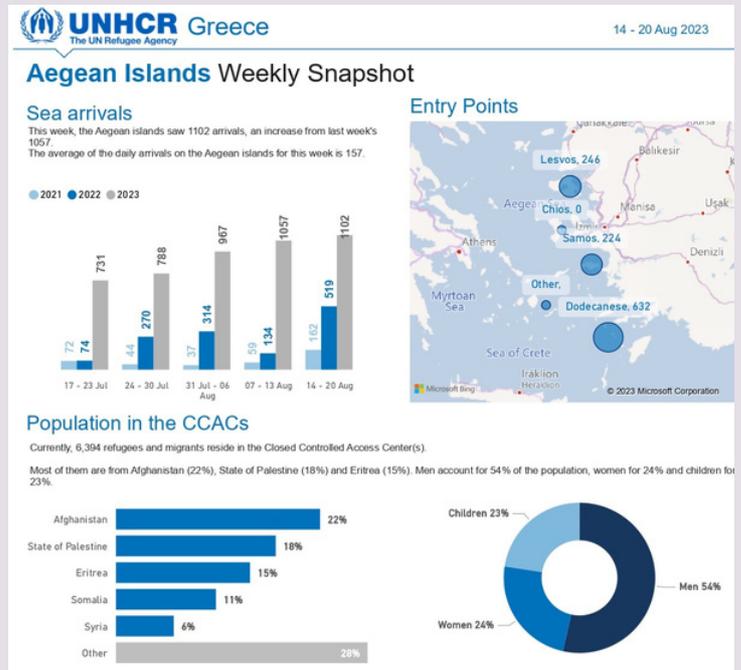
- In August, more than 5,800 asylum seekers arrived by boat to the Greek border islands in the eastern Aegean, representing **the largest number of arrivals in three years**.
- The Closed-Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) in Samos reached capacity by 1st September, **when 202 new arrivals were registered in one day**, while on the other islands that have similar facilities (Lesvos, Chios, Leros, and Kos) the number of asylum seekers increased significantly.
- Since the Pylos shipwreck in June, a noticeable shift in the Greek state's practice towards people crossing borders to seek asylum continued to be noted by local actors. There has been a decrease in reports of pushbacks to Turkey, and increased numbers of highly photographed and publicised sea rescues being circulated in Greek media, including in Samos.
- Shipwrecks continued to be reported, and on 28th August, two tragedies occurred, claiming the lives of 1 woman seeking asylum in Samos, and 4 children off the coast of Lesvos.
- Arrivals, including shipwreck survivors, are **detained in fenced-off areas of the Samos CCAC for more than two weeks** while awaiting registration. They have **no access to medical care, clothing, or legal aid**, and their phones are taken for up to 7 days by the police. By the end of August, more than 800 arrivals were being 'de facto' detained in the CCAC while awaiting registration, including women, children and unaccompanied minors.

1864 asylum seekers and refugees resided in Samos by 31 August, a significant increase from last month's 599. An estimated 50% were held in quarantine detention awaiting registration of their asylum requests. **1236 new arrivals were registered in Samos in August, a significant increase compared to July (211) and June (29).**

UNHCR figures from 14-20 August, which do not include detained new arrivals, estimate that:

- 22% of the camp population originate from Afghanistan;
- 19% from Palestine;
- 10% from Somalia;
- 9% from Afghanistan, 7% Syria;
- 34% from 'Other' unspecified countries.
- Men account for 61% of the population, women for 21% and children for 18%.

Its figures for arrivals to the Aegean islands during the week 14-20 August are pictured here.



Samos Legal Centre activities in August



The ASF France team in Samos conducted 355 consultations this month, its highest number in three years!

- 78 new applicants were welcomed for legal aid;
- 77 interview preparations were carried out, representing over 154 hours of legal support;
- 150 updates for ongoing cases were registered;
- The lawyers supported 5 applicants at interviews, with 5 accompanying legal memoranda;
- 2 appeals and 5 appeal memoranda were submitted;
- 27 requests were sent to the Asylum and camp management authorities to advocate for enhanced protections for vulnerable applicants.

Appeal success- K* from Somalia

K* first contacted the Legal Centre in July 2022. Her asylum interview date had been rescheduled and was due to take place the following day. This left K* with just **one day to prepare** and seek legal aid. As a single woman with low literacy levels and a survivor of female genital mutilation, K* was evidently vulnerable and in need of additional support. She hadn't seen a doctor in the CCAC or received any vulnerability assessment.

Like all Somali asylum seekers arriving at the Greek border islands, K* was subjected to an admissibility interview, to identify if Turkey could be considered a safe country for her, despite the fact that she had spent less than two weeks there. An ASF France lawyer met K* the day before her interview and identified her specific needs. At her asylum interview, the lawyer demanded a vulnerability assessment, and highlighted how K*'s memory and ability to recount events had been affected by the trauma she'd experienced in her country. She argued that K* should be interviewed about Somalia and not Turkey.

In October 2022, K* received a negative decision from the Greek Asylum Service, who had determined that Turkey was a 'safe country' for her. With the support of ASF France, K* appealed this decision. Her lawyer highlighted the lack of support K* had received in Turkey, her inability to claim asylum there, and the fact that in Somalia, K* was considered 'stateless' as she had originated from a minority tribe and had no identity documents.

For the next 10 months, the ASF France team kept in contact with K*, who had been transferred to a refugee camp on mainland Greece. In August, **more than one year after arriving in Samos, K* learned that she had been recognised as a refugee by Greece.**

Her case highlights the impact of the fast-track border procedure on vulnerable applicants, **and the enduring need for ASF France's reactive and consistent legal support, especially for female-identifying applicants.**