



AVOCATS SANS FRONTIERES  
France

*Là où la défense n'a plus la parole*

# SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE

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**Providing legal  
assistance to  
asylum seekers on  
Samos, Greece**



# THE ORGANIZATION

Created in 1998, **Avocats Sans Frontières France (ASF France)** is an international non-profit solidarity association regulated by the 1901 law that **contributes to promoting respect of fundamental rights**.

Its mission is to :

- **Provide** pro bono defense for anyone whose fundamental rights are threatened, have been arbitrarily detained or tortured ;
- **Defend** all persons deprived of a free and independent defence as well as human rights defenders who are threatened or abused in the exercise of their functions;
- **Strengthen** the capacity and autonomy of local actors in the defence and promotion of human rights (civil society and judicial actors).

## BACKGROUND

Europe is in the midst of the **largest population flow of citizens it has seen since the Second World War**. By land or sea, millions of people have made the long, hard and often dangerous journey to Europe from the continents of Asia and Africa to escape the insecurity of those regions. Between January and December 2022, more than **330,000 people entered Europe irregularly to seek shelter**.

Due to its geographical position, opposite the Turkish coast in the Aegean Sea, Samos island receives a large number of people crossing to seek international protection every year. In September 2021, the first EU-funded "controlled and closed" centre was inaugurated in Samos, the first of many on the Greek border islands, with a capacity for 3,000 asylum seekers.

In order to respond to the considerable need for legal assistance on the island, Avocats Sans Frontières France opened a Legal Centre in Samos in January 2019, whose objective is to contribute to **guaranteeing the right to seek asylum and provide free and independent legal aid**.



To this end, the Greek and international field team provide **free and independent legal advice at all stages of the asylum procedure** while practicing an open door policy and aiming to empower applicants by preparing them for each step of the procedure.



With the opening of the new CCAC in Samos, located 7km kilometres away from the centre in Vathy and the ASF France office, concerns have been raised about **ensuring meaningful access to legal assistance**. As a "hotspot" island, a "fast-track" legal procedure exists in Samos to process asylum applications. In 2022, additional movement restrictions were imposed on camp residents due to increased arrivals. **Transparency of processes has become extremely limited and access to services compromised**.

New arrivals are often unable to leave the camp before their asylum interviews have taken place, which affects their ability to obtain legal advice beforehand.

Many legal and non-legal actors left the island when the population was relocated, and ASF France became **the main independent organisation providing free legal support**. When a large number of new arrivals are registered in Samos, ASF France is directly requested by the UNHCR to provide them with information and prepare them for their interviews.

To ensure the visibility and accessibility of its services, ASF France has quickly adapted to the new context by providing **remote consultations** when applicants cannot leave the new facility and by developing detailed audio guides in several languages to prepare people for their interviews.



**Referrals and cooperation with other actors on the island have been strengthened.** ASF France is in close partnership with Samos Volunteers to ensure that the needs of beneficiaries are taken care of. We collaborate with other organisations to ensure that new arrivals are aware of the legal services offered by ASF France.



“ I left my country for Greece in 2019 because of the conflicts between English and French speakers, as I was persecuted by the military. When I received a first negative decision, a friend told me that you were lawyers specialised in asylum and appeals, so I came to seek you out. I was warmly welcomed in your office and the way you explained to me procedures has helped me understanding the reasons why my case was rejected, so that I can explain my story in more details. Four months after filing the appeal, I received good news. Everything changed in my life, I am no longer afraid. I have a job and a house and I will start the family reunification procedure for my wife and child.

Nestor, Cameroonian, beneficiary of the Samos Legal Centre

# ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN IN 2022

## Juridical assistance and support with asylum proceedings :

- **882 asylum seekers and refugees** were informed about the steps of the asylum procedure and their fundamental rights and were given answers to questions concerning their individual situations. This was done both in person at the office, and through the Centre's hotline.
- **388 preparatory sessions**, each lasting approximately 2 hours each, were organised for 252 asylum seekers prior to their main asylum interview, and support was provided at the interview itself for 35 **particularly vulnerable applicants**.
- **Assistance was provided to 23 asylum seekers** who received a negative decision at first instance. Greek lawyers at the Legal Centre explained the reasons for the rejection, did research, drafted and submitted appeals as well as the supporting memorandum at their hearings. 67 sessions were conducted to prepare these appeals.
- **23 information provision and preparation sessions** for subsequent asylum requests were organised.

## Protection and support to people in vulnerable situations:

- **Protection of 557 asylum seekers in vulnerable situations** by referring them to the appropriate structures in order to receive adequate care and support tailored to their needs. Assistance through strategic litigation by submitting applications to national, European and international protection bodies, such as the Greek Ombudsman, was also provided in 2022. Further assistance on **16 ongoing cases before the European Court of Human Rights was ensured**. These types of actions mainly concerned women who have just given birth and unaccompanied minors.
- **218 information workshops** for asylum seekers were organised. The aim of these workshops is to inform asylum seekers about the steps of the procedure, where they can get assistance and to answer their general questions.
- **73 online legal information provision workshops** aimed to inform volunteers from other organisations about the legal context of the island and to promote the services provided by the Centre in order to increase cooperation and referrals were conducted.





*I contacted ASF France for guidance and support during my asylum procedure. I had been oriented by the UNHCR who had given us the contact of ASF France upon our arrival in case we needed legal assistance. Alexia helped me to prepare for the asylum interview. She explained my rights, how the asylum interview would be conducted, the type of questions I would be asked and how to answer them. After the first appointment I felt that Alexia was there to help me. As I felt more confident, during the second appointment I was better able to explain things. During the asylum interview I felt comfortable answering questions because that was what we had prepared together. When they gave me international protection, I cried tears of joy. Then I went back to my container to tell my friends in the camp that I had received a positive decision. Everyone was happy for me.*

Aminata, Cameroonian, beneficiary of the Samos Legal Centre



## EXPECTED RESULTS

FROM JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2022

882

**individually accompanied  
asylum seekers**

1782

**consultations with asylum  
seekers**



*I didn't know what to say at my very first interview. But once we met and we started talking about my case and told you my story, I felt much better. I was ready for anything and my interview went well. My life in the camp was like a prison, it was very difficult. But afterwards I met more people and made friends and had a simple life that was a bit better. When I learned about the decision, I was so happy that I cannot express my feelings in words!*

M\*, Sudanese, beneficiary of the Samos Legal Centre



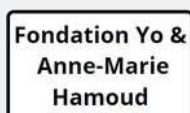


# PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

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Choose Love is both a partner and a donor of the project.



## WILL YOU BE OUR NEXT DONOR?

*We need funds to continue to protect asylum seekers' rights.*  
Will you be able to support the project?



## CONTACT

### **Bláithín QUIGLEY**

Project Manager Samos Legal Centre  
ASF France  
samos@avocatssansfrontieres-france.org

### **Mélanie CANOVAS**

Program Officer (HQ)  
ASF France  
projets@avocatssansfrontieres-france.org



[www.avocatssansfrontieres-france.org](http://www.avocatssansfrontieres-france.org)