



SAMOS LEGAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the 32nd Newsletter of the project!

September and October 2024 were particularly deadly in the Aegean Sea. People attempting to cross the border by sea continue to find the routes increasingly hostile. Nearly five **shipwrecks** have been reported in the Aegean sea in the last two months. This underlines once again the need to **call for safe routes** for people seeking international protection.

Displaced people coming to Samos face numerous obstacles in their search for safety, **from push-backs at sea to arbitrary criminalisation on land.**

As if that was not enough, after a journey to the gates of Europe fraught with obstacles, people are forced to live in **inhumane conditions** in the Samos CCAC. Since mid-October, the number of people living in the camp has exceeded its official capacity, leading to a worrying and really concerning deterioration in living conditions in the camp, with people **lacking access to basic items to ensure dignified reception conditions.** Some people have no beds and sleep on cardboard boxes salvaged from the rubbish. Similarly, access to hygiene is extremely complicated, with unsanitary showers and toilets that sometimes have no doors, with deplorable repercussions in terms of sanitation.

CONTEXT

In September and October, 3 deadly shipwrecks were reported near Samos costs.

On the 23rd of September, a boat sank, around 150 meters from the North West of Samos. It was reported to have been carrying 33 people. Again, on the 20st October, an alert was sent from a boat in distress 5 km north east of Samos. 2 people drowned on that day.

These very tragic and sad incidents serves again as a stark reminder of the perilous journey so many people undertake in search of safety. As we reflect on these tragic losses, we are reminded of the urgent need for compassion and solidarity, and the critical flight to create safe pathways for those forced to flee their homes.



On top of the risk of a bad weather, or sinking of the boat, people seeking safety are very often pushed back to sea by Greek Coast Guard with the support of Frontex. This practice has become the norm and violated European and international regulations.

Many people arriving in Samos find to be also arrested and detain as “smugglers” as a part of being accused of illegal entry in the European territories. Before even given the chance to apply for international protection, they face instead sometimes more than 100 years of imprisonment.

According to Aegean Boat Report data, the arrivals on the Greek islands in September has increased 25.1% compared to August. But 59 of pushbacks performed by the Greek coast guard, have been registred for the same month.

Considering that there are almost no safe routes for people seeking asylum, these politics of criminalisation of people on the move is adding more cruelty and absurdness to the whole situation.

Our partner in Samos, Human Rights Legal Project, is one of the few actors in Samos acting for the defense of those unjustly charged of being criminals by the Greek authorities, supporting them by assisting them in prison , organising legal support and communicating with their relatives.



OUR WORK IN FIGURES



5

sessions to provide legal information were organised over the last two months

45

Asylum seekers attended legal workshops

42

volunteers from non-legal organisation participated to our online workshop

Our team over the last period:



Project Manager



Legal and technical assistant



2 lawyers



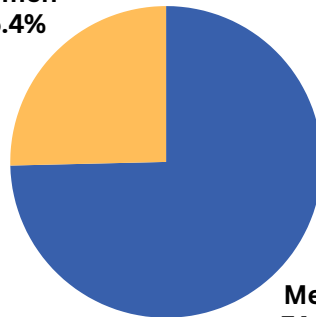
3 caseworkers



4 interpreters

People directly supported :

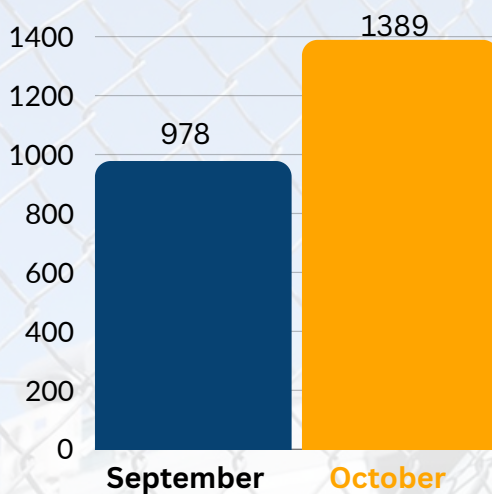
Women
25.4%



Men
74.6%

15.9% of the people we met have declared having survived from SGBV, human trafficking or inhuman treatment.

Number of arrivals* :



*Data from the Greek Ministry of Migration

42

individual preparations for asylum interviews

18

consultations on appeal stage

TEAM UPDATE

With a wealth of experience in France and abroad working with people-on-the-move, **Souleymane** joined the team for a few months at the end of September and is already proving to be a real addition. His attentiveness, humility and professional awareness are more than appreciated, and his Arabic skills are a great asset to the team!



In parallel, a **delegation from headquarters and the referee of the ASF France volunteer experts** paid a week-long visit to the team in the field at the beginning of October. This was an opportunity to discuss the situation on the island, to meet our partners and to strengthen or develop collaborations with local actors.



LEGAL REVIEW

On October 4th 2024, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) delivered an important decision. It promises to be revolutionary!

The 'EU-Turkey deal', signed in 2016, to control the number of crossings from Turkey to the Greek islands by requiring some applicants to pass an 'admissibility test'. before they can apply for asylum in Europe. An interview based on the 'safe third country' concept for Syrians, Somalis, Afghans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis to determine whether Turkey should readmit them back.

So all failed asylum seekers should be deported to Turkey.

But since 2020, Turkey has not accepted readmission from Greece, as required by the deal, leaving thousands of people to their fate on the Greek islands, stuck in a kind of administrative vacuum.

In this case C-134/23, the CJEU ruled that “where it is established that the third country designated as generally safe by a member state does not in fact admit or readmit the applicants for international protection concerned, that member state cannot reject their applications for international protection as inadmissible on the basis of Article 33(2) (c) of Directive 2013/32 [third country grounds]” (para 54.)

This decision is of great importance because it overturns a long-standing arbitrary and abusive practice by the Greek authorities of rejecting asylum applications as inadmissible on the basis of the safe third country principle, and puts an end to the denial of the rights of many applicants



This is a great victory that must now be put into practice!

TESTIMONIES

We are happy to share with you the stories and words of two strong women who had managed to run away from abusive and violent marriages in their country of origin

N*, 38, - IRAN**

“ N*** , from Iran, was supported on her asylum application journey in Samos since she arrived on the island in June 2024.

She was referred to us by MSF (Doctors Without Borders) to be supported in her legal procedure and be prepared for her asylum interview.

From the very first minutes of the meeting with her, we sensed her vulnerability. She was showing clear signs of post-traumatic stress, and was even struggling to tell her story without bursting into tears. We therefore decided that one of our lawyers should be present during her interview to support her at this crucial stage.

N*** has suffered various forms of violence in her country of origin since she was very young, at the hands of members of her community and the authorities in her country.

One of our lawyers was present at her interview.

It was a very long interview, because of the many events that had taken place in Iran, forcing her to leave the country, which had oppressed her greatly as a woman, as a divorced woman, but also as a non-Muslim woman.

After her interview, we supplemented her story with a memorandum in which we added legal provisions, medical reports testifying to her fragile mental health and research on the situation in the country to support the danger of persecution she faces if she returns to Iran.

In particular, we stressed that her traumatic experience is unfortunately just another illustration of how repressive policies severely affect all aspects of women's public life in Iran. Like the 1979 law making it compulsory for all women to wear the veil, or the Iranian penal code, which does not classify rape as a separate crime.

”



Words of M**, 24 - GUINEA**
She received refugee status in October 2024

“
When I contacted you, I expected to be able to explain my story to someone who could listen to me, and make me feel safe. During the appointment with you [...] it was the first time I spoke about my story but **I felt listened to and I was able to explain** my injuries. I felt good among you. Because I received good explanations [...] I was encouraged to speak and I understand my rights and duties.

During the interview, **everything went well because I was well prepared**. I felt welcomed and supported by lawyers. So the interview was easier.

My life in the camp in Samos was very difficult. I didn't feel well at all. The food wasn't good. I didn't have anyone to confide in, no friends to talk to. I had way too much stress and a lot of suicidal thoughts. The conditions weren't good at all. Sometimes there was no water or good hygiene. I thought I was going to go crazy. **

When I received my decision. I was very happy. I cried a lot. But at least I know that I am protected by Greece and Europe and that what I experienced before can't happen again. It helps me to know that I am a fighter and I can be proud of having gone through all that [...] now I feel that I have strength in me. It's a little thanks to you.

Then I would like to continue to find more strength [...] I want to work in an NGO and help children who are mistreated and who are alone. **I want to be able to help people who have experienced the same difficulties as me.**”

*facility next to the camp from our partner Samos Volunteers

**For this type of vulnerable case, the team is doing referral to MSF so the person can receive a psychological support