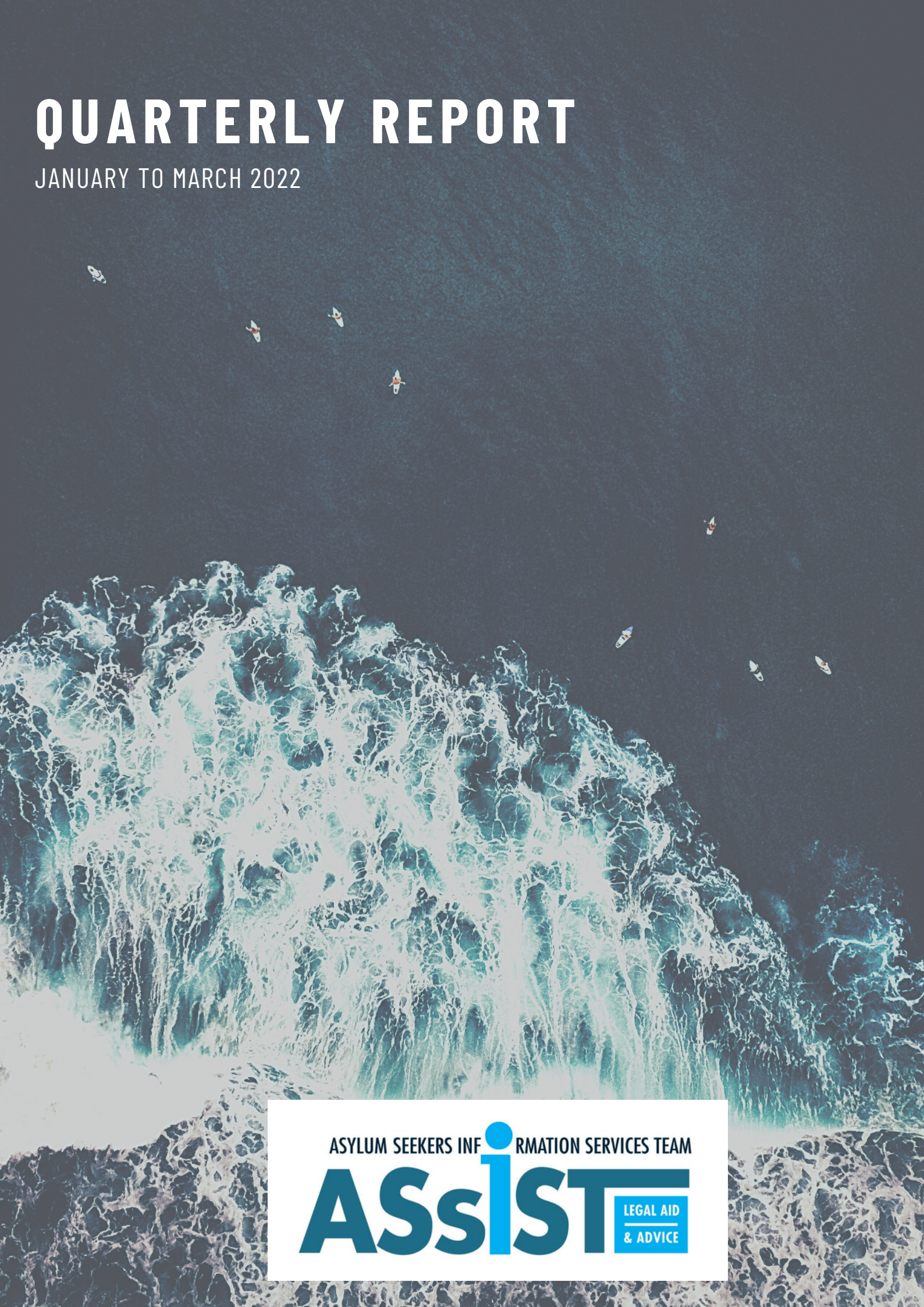


QUARTERLY REPORT

JANUARY TO MARCH 2022



ASYLUM SEEKERS INFORMATION SERVICES TEAM

ASsIST

LEGAL AID
& ADVICE

CONTEXT UPDATE

CHIOS ISLAND

During this first quarter of 2022, the total number of people arriving on Chios by boat from Turkey seeking international protection and registered at the Vial RIC was 79 people. Between 01 and 23 January 2022(1), 21 persons arrived seeking international protection and there were 10 authorised departures; 600 asylum seekers and beneficiaries were living on Chios Island of whom 457 were living in the Vial RIC (Reception Identification Centre: containment facility). From 24 January and 27 February(2), there were 27 arrivals and 21 authorised departures and 544 asylum seekers and beneficiaries living on Chios Island of whom 400 remained in the Vial RIC. There were 21 authorised departures. At the end of March, there were 311 people residing in the RIC, 194 self-accommodated in and around the town of Chios and 11 unaccompanied minors in safe accommodation: a total of 529 persons. There were also 76 spontaneous departures from Chios Island. Unofficial sources inform of several boats arriving and reports of pushbacks continued throughout the quarter. Several organisations report receiving messages and photo evidence from people who landed on Chios and were then 'pushed back' to Turkey.

In February, the local Chios community held several demonstrations in the town's main square against the proposal for a 'closed' centre to the north of Chios township, against pushbacks and against the constant and continued abuse of basic rights of those who seek and those who have received international protection in Greece. As part of the demonstrations against the proposed 'closed' (detention) centre: local people blocked the road leading to the site on shifts day and night preventing requisite equipment entering the site. It is also reported by witnesses that, at the port, demonstrating locals prevented the unloading of heavy equipment destined for the construction of the Centre. Plans for a closed detention centre on a coastal site north of Chios town are rumored to be either delayed or abandoned.

(1) UNHCR Chios Island Weekly Snapshot Chios Island to 24 January published on 8 February 2022.

(2) UNHCR Chios Island Weekly Snapshot Chios Island to 27 February published on 02 March 2022.

CONTEXT UPDATE

There were some service improvements post-holiday season 2021-22 as well as some loss of critical services. The Cash Assistance program recommenced in the last days of December, with cash cards being issued and back payments made for November-December 2021 in early January. This Program is now being managed for the Government by the Catholic Relief Service (CRS). Several organisations working in Vial have established activity programs: art & crafts, sports and English and Greek lessons are available. Improvements too for those with confirmed international protection in accessing the vaccination program. Tax numbers are now automatically assigned to asylum seekers and appear on their ID cards. There is still a need to support them to set up a tax account with the national tax office online. Unfortunately, there have also been many reported errors in the recording of the tax numbers and this is causing undue delays for people seeking accommodation and work.

UNHCR informed of an increase in positive decisions being issued to single women in general as well as to citizens of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Palestine. (3)

There were significant losses in services for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection on Chios Island. There has been no psychiatric support available since the end of January and, as of end-March, no government doctor in the camp pending recruitment. There is therefore no doctor available to sign medical registrations. With the closure of Caritas at the end of December, no solution has yet been found to transport applicants from Vial to hospital appointments or other services. The Clinic inside Vial run by SMH, an NGO, has 4 volunteers, 1 doctor, 2 dentists and 1 nurse supported by 1 interpreter. The SMH Team are currently taking people to and from the hospital in taxis @ Euros 15 one way. It is not permitted to carry passengers in rented vehicles driven by their team members. This is yet another added expense that an NGO should not have to cover. The local bus service has two early morning Vial-Chios return services and two early afternoon services, the last one departing Chios at 14h, this can be a solution for those receiving cash assistance. Single one way fares cost Euros 1.60. This does not however resolve the transportation issue for those needing to go to the hospital, 2 kms from the central bus stop or for less able persons to access town and other public services and facilities.

(3) UNHCR Chios Island Weekly Snapshot Chios Island to published on 2022

CONTEXT UPDATE

The departure of service organisations, International Rescue Committee and Action For Education, both announced their closure in mid-February reducing further access to psycho-social support and informal education services.

The Chios Port Police continue to issue Euro 5,000 fines to new arrivals who cannot meet the COVID19 entry requirements for Greece. Mobile phones are still confiscated until new arrivals are released from Lefkonika quarantine and sent to the Vial RIC for registration.

COVID19 PCR tests continue to be required for unvaccinated persons to access public services: Citizen Services Bureau, police, Asylum Services, etc. The cost of authorised COVID19 tests (@Euros 6.00 valid for 48 hours) and asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection need to access these services to progress their applications or procedures to obtain IDs, etc.

On 01 March 2022, the Aegean Island ferries recommenced services with mainland Turkey, for the first time since March 2020. There is no indication that deportations from the Islands are being planned, that is applicants with no further legal recourse are being allowed to leave Chios for the mainland. If deportation to Turkey was foreseen in the immediate future, permission would not be granted and they would most likely be detained on Chios pending transfer to Mytilene for deportation.

Overall, deportations to Turkey, we are reliably informed, are not happening and at present are not possible. The EU-Turkey agreement is not being observed. It has no legal standing as a bilateral agreement and neither party appears to be pursuing its implementation. Nonetheless, asylum seekers of five nationalities (Afghans, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Somalis and Syrians) are first interviewed to ascertain if Turkey is a safe country for them to seek international protection. If they are found to be 'safe' in Turkey, what then is expected of them? For all those of all nationalities whose applications have failed and whose legal options are exhausted, there seems to be no options available: arrest and detention may follow or a limbo without papers and without any form of social support.

CONTEXT UPDATE

ATHENS AND THE MAINLAND

At the end of March, RSA and PROSYL published a “Beneficiaries of international protection in Greece Access to documents and socio-economic rights” the Report provides:

“...an update on the situation of beneficiaries of international protection in Greece, including readmitted status holders from other European countries. As highlighted in previous reports, the Greek government maintains a policy expecting immediate autonomy and self-sufficiency of persons granted international protection. This policy, in conjunction with chronic legal and practical barriers to access to basic socio-economic rights may in many cases result in homelessness and extreme deprivation contrary to the prohibition on inhuman and degrading treatment under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and Article 4 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.”

Many beneficiaries remain in mainland camps unofficially but with no food provided(4). Applicants for international protection face some of the same barriers, however, as long as their applications are still being processed, they have access to shelter, food and cash assistance as a minimum. For those whose applications have failed and who have no further legal recourse, the situation is also dire. The threat of arrest is ever present as they have no papers, no status, no rights whatsoever. They are directed to leave the country, but this requires means and resources that few have or can get. They too try to stay ‘unofficially’ in the mainland camps.

There were some variations to procedures noted, some of which relate to the different Asylum Offices on the mainland.

(4) See p. 17 of the RSA & Pro ASYL Report for a graph showing the numbers of people in camps compared to those who are receiving food.

CONTEXT UPDATE

People arriving in Greece can no longer register for international protection anywhere in Greece. Now they can only register their claim at the RIC in Evros or one of the six RICS on the Aegean Islands. Those having travelled to the main urban centres without knowing of this new provision must now make their way at their own cost to one of the RICS.

Another change to procedures prevents lawyers from arranging appointments on their clients' behalf to submit Subsequent Applications. This now must be done by the client and only via Skype. This has been and is problematic as, while some people succeed in getting appointments, others complain that the line is always busy or not answering.

The Attica Regional Asylum Office now requires that the original Power of Attorney be delivered to their office before a file can be released to a lawyer and some lawyers have been requested for a Solemn Declaration stating that they are the sole user of the email account when forwarding a signed scanned copy of the POA. If these requirements will remain in place, it remains to be seen. So far, only the one Office in Attica is requiring this.

PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES

January 2022 statistics reflected fewer clients overall due to the holiday season closures. The increased number of new arrivals in December flowed into the January demand for our services resulting in a significant increase in interview preparations, with lower demand for other services. The nationalities of arrivals in December is also reflected in our statistics, for example, in just one boat, 47 Palestinians arrived. Referrals from Athens decreased over December and January, again due to the closure of many NGOs over the holiday season. AGLs interactions with the Asylum Services and other authorities remained constant. Hence the caseload continued to reflect a significant increase in new arrivals on Chios in December 2021.

February saw an overall decrease in caseload, 50% of consultations were interview preparations, while in March there was an increase in demand for all legal services, with a majority of clients based in Athens. The number of enquiries received by A.Ss.I.S.T. office remains relatively stable between 780 to 800 enquiries per month. As of April, with our new Team members in Athens, A.Ss.I.S.T. will be operating two phones, with the Client Services team members working closely together to ensure optimum service.

An increase in referrals and the overall number of clients in the next quarter, is anticipated with the Team presence in Athens.

INFORMATION SERVICES

As shown in the contact log and statistics for legal consultations, A.Ss.I.S.T. continues to respond to enquiries from many asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. The number of enquiries received on the office phone remained stable between 780 to 800 per month.

Client Contact Log (Office)

From January to March 2022

2373

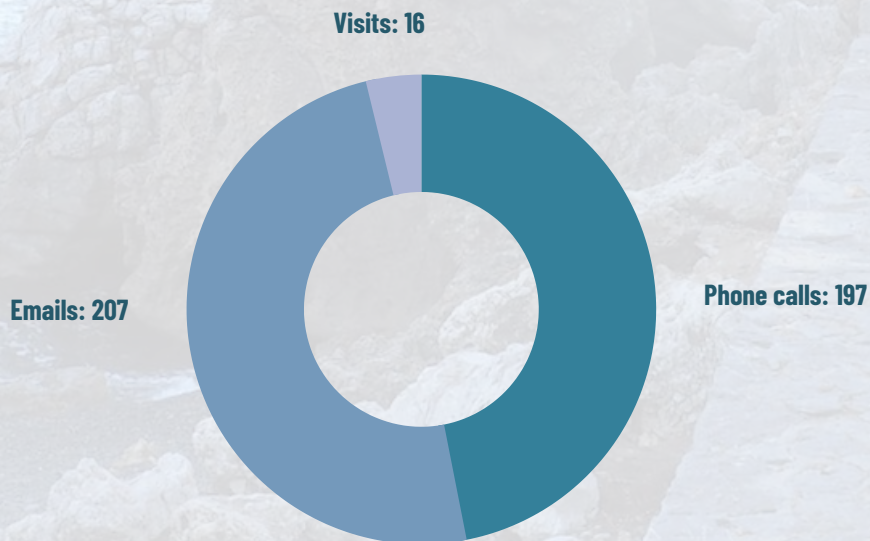
Text Messages Sent

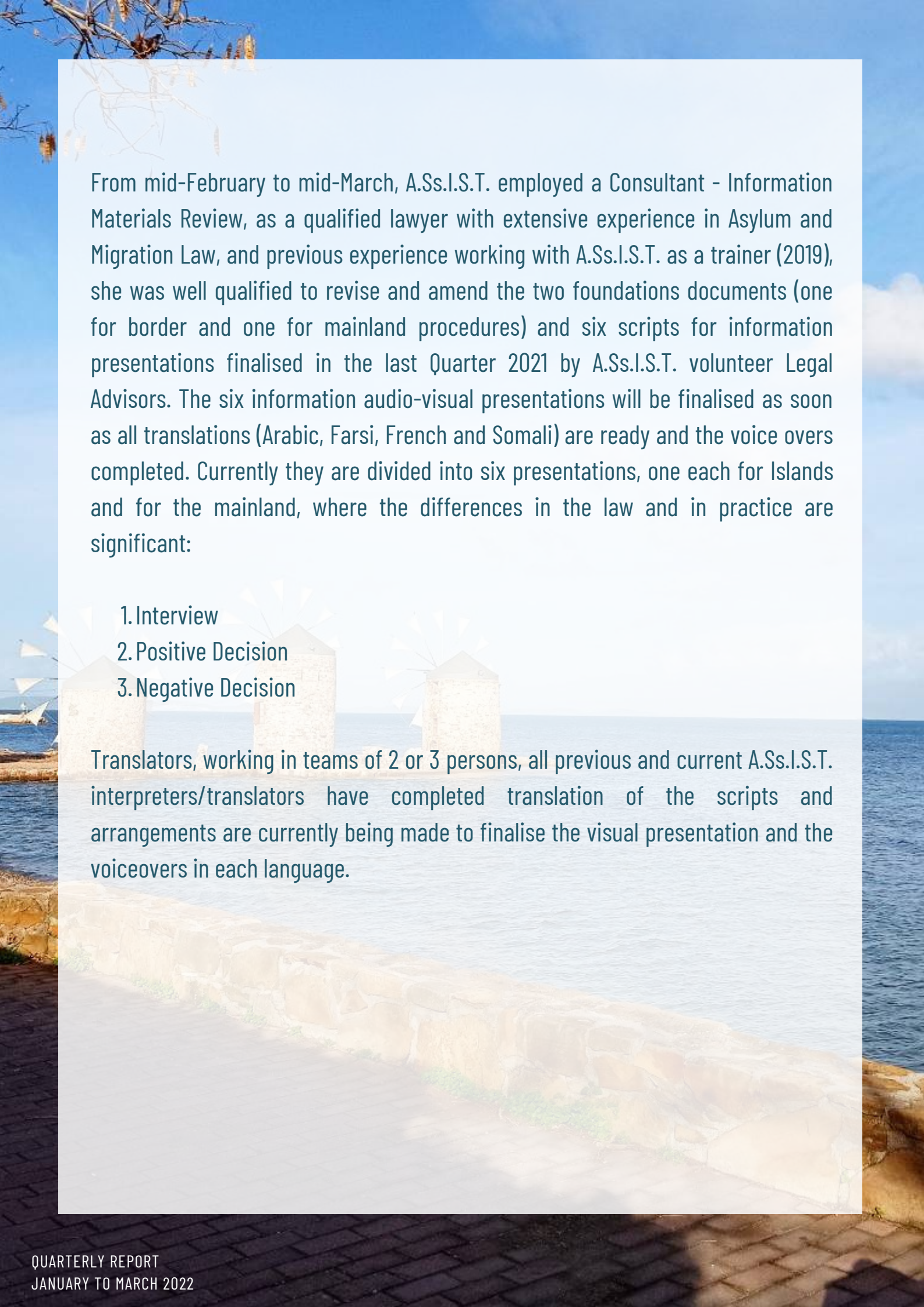
6

Average Daily Contacts

Contact Log with Greek Authorities (AGLs)

From January to March 2022



The background of the page is a photograph of a coastal town. In the foreground, there is a paved walkway made of dark, rectangular stones. A low, light-colored stone wall runs along the edge of the walkway. Beyond the wall, the sea is visible, with several traditional stone buildings and windmills (sajams) situated on a hillside. The sky is clear and blue. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box in the upper half of the image.

From mid-February to mid-March, A.Ss.I.S.T. employed a Consultant - Information Materials Review, as a qualified lawyer with extensive experience in Asylum and Migration Law, and previous experience working with A.Ss.I.S.T. as a trainer (2019), she was well qualified to revise and amend the two foundations documents (one for border and one for mainland procedures) and six scripts for information presentations finalised in the last Quarter 2021 by A.Ss.I.S.T. volunteer Legal Advisors. The six information audio-visual presentations will be finalised as soon as all translations (Arabic, Farsi, French and Somali) are ready and the voice overs completed. Currently they are divided into six presentations, one each for Islands and for the mainland, where the differences in the law and in practice are significant:

1. Interview
2. Positive Decision
3. Negative Decision

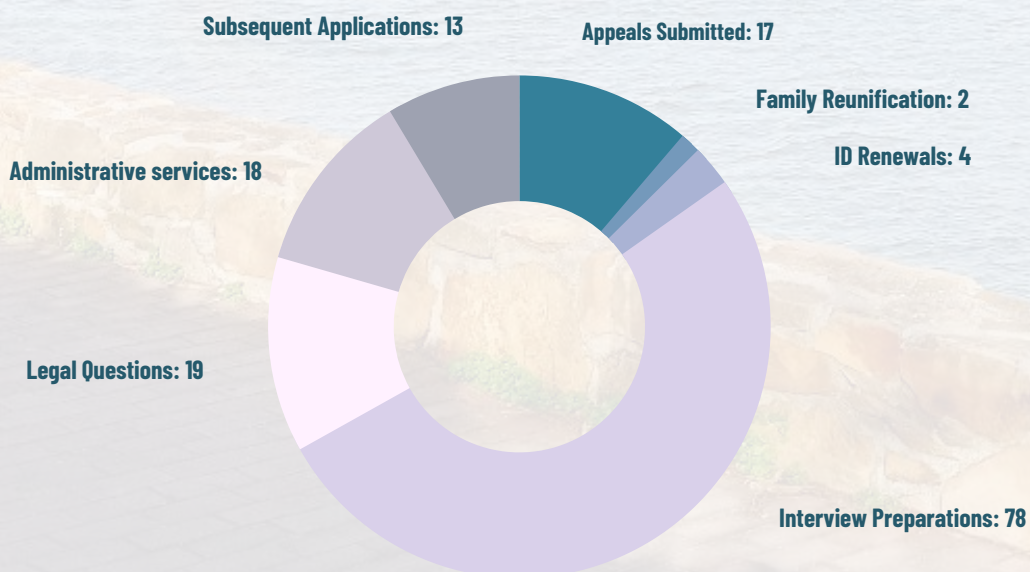
Translators, working in teams of 2 or 3 persons, all previous and current A.Ss.I.S.T. interpreters/translators have completed translation of the scripts and arrangements are currently being made to finalise the visual presentation and the voiceovers in each language.

LEGAL AID

The number of legal consultations over this quarter remained stable, clients based in Athens represented approximately one third of the legal aid clients with the majority of legal aid services being accessed by applicants and beneficiaries on Chios Island. The number of interpreters required to meet the needs of the more diverse nationalities, 20 in all, in the client group increased and A.Ss.I.S.T. was able to recruit temporary interpreters for Krio, Soninke and Bengali through our network. Interview preparations increased significantly while the number of appeals and subsequent applications were slightly fewer than in the previous Quarter. There was a significant increase in referrals from Athens, a total of 28 referrals were received from other Organisations. Our Chios-based Associate Greek lawyers' (AGLs') interventions with the authorities remained commensurate with the increased caseload. While there was more than a 30% increase in the number of enquiries received on the office phones with a second phone only becoming operational in the second half of March 2022.

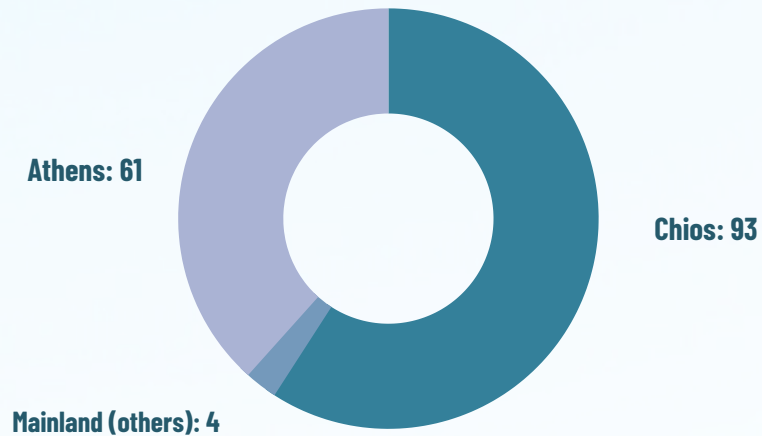
Consultations

From 158 consultations



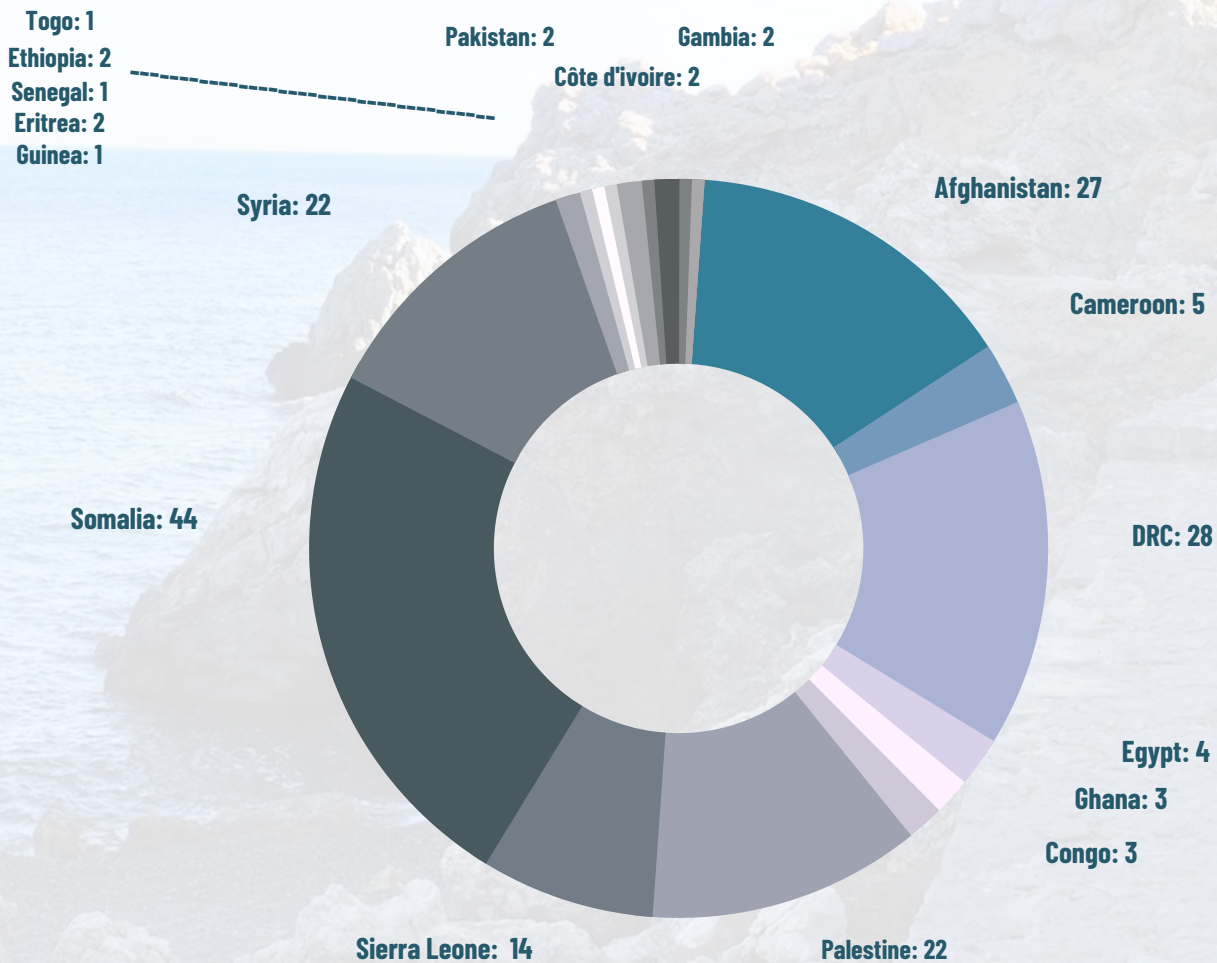
Geographical location of clients

From 158 consultations



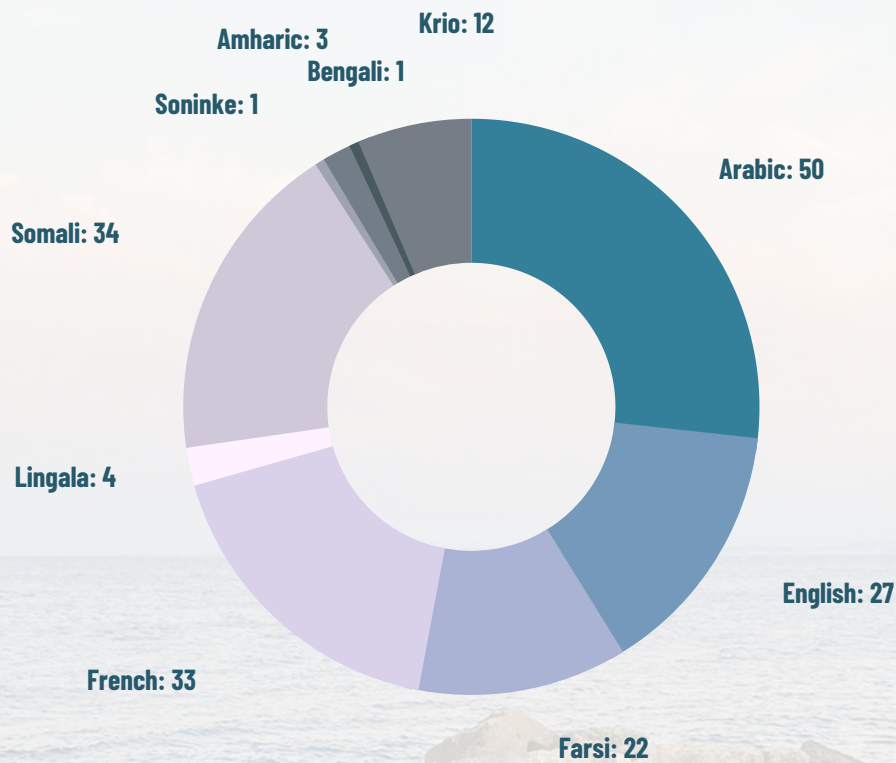
Nationality Breakdown

From a total of 187 clients across all age groups



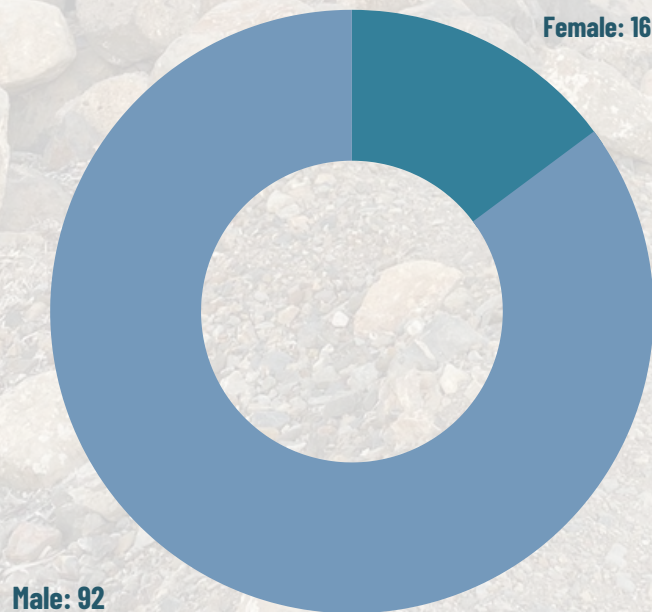
Language Breakdown

From a total of 187 clients attending consultations



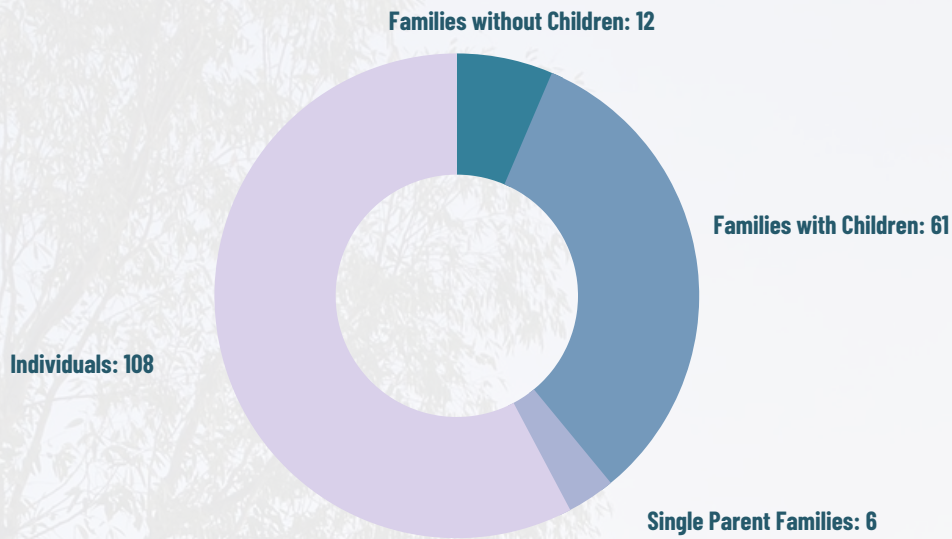
Gender Breakdown

From a total of 108 people attending as individuals (i.e, not as a part of a family unit)



Family Composition Breakdown

From a total of 187 clients attending consultations



Appeals

Since 01 January 2022, our AGLs have won 5 appeals.. Our Associate Greek lawyers continue to do a fantastic job!

The Team

The Team farewelled Florence Hallack-Wolff, volunteer Information Manager for several months thanking her for the excellent contribution to our work. In February, A.Ss.I.S.T. retained the invaluable services of our long-term volunteer, Maya Kerbellec, who was appointed to the new employee position of Office & Client Services Manager in a competitive field of applicants.



Maya Kerbellec
Office & Client Services Manager
Chios

A volunteer Communications Coordinator – Social Media will arrive in April 2022, will be inducted in Chios and may also spend time with our Team in Athens.

The Athens-Chios Co-location Project

In March, the Team also welcomed two newly recruited Team members, both of whom, after initial introductions and inductions, are now based in Athens: Melanie Mavrogiorgi, Office & Client Services Development Coordinator and Miranda Gkanetsou, lawyer.

A.Ss.I.S.T. leased a furnished three-bedroom apartment to provide accommodation for volunteers based in Athens and Team members visiting from Chios.

Melanie Mavrogiorgi

*Office & Client Services Development Coordinator
Athens*



Miranda Gkanetsou
Lawyer - Athens



Pavlos Tomazos
Associate Lawyer - Chios

Office space

Arrangements have been confirmed with Safe Place-Greece (SPG) to share office space, until A.Ss.I.S.T. requires more space and has found more permanent premises. Currently we have exclusive access to a private office with two workstations on the mezzanine floor with a small waiting area at the door and have shared access to facilities on the ground floor.

In February, A.Ss.I.S.T. received a donation of furniture and some equipment from IRC when they closed their Chios Office. This included desks (4), desk drawers (2), cabinets (2), office chairs (4), air conditioners (3) and other minor furnishings. As Safe Place-Greece is not requiring a financial contribution from A.Ss.I.S.T. for the shared office space, A.Ss.I.S.T. paid for the shipment of the donated goods to Athens and shared the donated goods with SPG. This donation represents considerable savings in the establishment of a future office in Athens: shipping costs were considerably less than the purchase price of these goods.

Networking & Meetings

Team Members continued to strengthen our networks bearing in mind the diverse services available to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. The two new Team members based in Athens, both experienced in working with our client base, bring with them relevant contacts that readily strengthens our network in Athens.

A.Ss.I.S.T. is represented at both national and Chios-based coordination meetings, most of which are held on a monthly basis: UNHCR Protection Working Group and UNHCR Legal Working Group (Chios) and Legal Aid (national).

In the second Quarter of 2022, we are looking forward to the

- Holding Information Sessions in collaboration with several partner organisations;
- Growth and expansion of our services in Chios and in Athens.
- Publication of our End of Year Report 2021.
- The Annual General Meeting of A.Ss.I.S.T.

We look forward to your continued support.

Our renewed thanks to all our donors, to our loyal partners and of course to all our Team members, past and present!

Thank you for taking the time to read this report.

If you would like to make a donation to ASsIST please visit <https://www.assistchios.info/en/donate> or contact office@assistchios.info