

QUARTERLY REPORT

APRIL TO JUNE 2022



ASYLUM SEEKERS INFORMATION SERVICES TEAM

ASsIST

LEGAL AID
& ADVICE

CONTEXT UPDATE

NEW LAW PASSED

Another new law came into force on 10 June, 2022: Law No. 4939/2022 *“Ratification of the Code of Reception for the reception, the international protection of third country nationals and stateless persons and the temporary protection in case of mass influx of displaced foreigners”*.

This is the third major legislation in Asylum and Migration Law in Greece in as many years: specifically Law 4636/2019, Law 4686/2020 and most recently Law 4939/2022, each law harsher than the last. The amendments to these laws and the constant revisions to procedures and regulations announced by the authorities complicates the provision of legal services and compounds the difficulties faced by applicants for international protection.

CHIOS ISLAND

During this second 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 137 people. There were very few arrivals in April/May, less than 20 persons. Between 01 and 26 June 2022 (1), 107 persons arrived seeking international protection, more than 50% of whom are Somalis. By 26th June there were 385 asylum seekers and beneficiaries were living on Chios Island of whom 157 were living in the Vial RIC (Reception Identification Centre: containment facility), 169 self-accommodated in and around the town of Chios and the balance hosted in other facilities. As in the first Quarter, 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.

(1) UNHCR Chios Weekly Snapshot dated 26 June 2022

CONTEXT UPDATE

Proposed New 'Closed' Facility On Chios Island.

The Municipality of Chios has won the court case against the central government over the ownership and use of the current Vial RIC property. And, RIC employees were informed that the current Vial facility will be handed back to the Municipality at the end of December and that a new 'closed' facility will open at the end of 2022 at the previously proposed site on a rocky barren peninsular next to a fishing village, about 25 minutes' drive north of Chios town on the east coast of the Island. In direct contradiction to this information, local people were expressing the belief that the government's plan to build another 'closed' facility on Chios has been dropped due to popular demand. There were many demonstrations in early 2022 against the proposed new facility. More recently, local people express the view that the new Facility will not go forward before the next elections are held: due in June 2023. Some also affirm the belief that, due to the downturn in the economy, COVID and the Russian war in Ukraine, the government will bring forward the elections for 2023 to reduce the risk of losing the elections.

It is a fact that the Municipality won the court case to recover the Vial property from the Ministry of Migration. The remainder of this information remains to be seen and is either proposed, conjecture or rumour.

There were no further reduction in services to asylum seekers in Vial RIC or marked improvements in services, to our knowledge (1). It is however muted that a transportation service to and from the hospital will be re-introduced in the next Quarter: July to September 2022.

With the lifting of COVID9 restrictions, the issuance of fines to new arrivals has ceased and fewer reports of mobile phones being confiscated or not returned. Quarantine of new arrivals is said to have also been reduced to 5 days and PCR tests are no longer required to access essential services.

(1) See A.Ss.I.S.T. Second Quarter Report at <https://assistchios.info>

CONTEXT UPDATE

Deportations Or Legal Forced Removals

The EU-Turkey agreement appears to have been suspended indefinitely. Although land and sea borders reopened on 01 March 2022, the Greek authorities have confirmed that they are not sending readmission requests to the Turkey authorities(1). Media reports state also that the Turkish government is not accepting 'returnees' from Greece.

ATHENS AND THE MAINLAND

Our lawyers continue to face the same problems in Athens and on the mainland more generally.

- Fast tracked interviews are being held only days after the registration and/or release from detention; these interviews are being arranged without proper access to medical and vulnerability screening and without legal counselling about the procedure and without the possibility to exercise the right to have representation at the time of the interview.
- Many applicants also mention difficulties in submitting electronically (via email) additional documents presenting evidence for their case after their interview. This is their right and these documents could be crucial to their asylum claim.
- The systematic rejection based on admissibility of almost all applicants leaving them in limbo, without access to basic rights and they are not being returned to Turkey
- Applicants have also been deprived de facto of their right to receive legal aid and submit an appeal.

(1) Fenix, March 2022 "Caught in a Loop" p. 10 #47 available at <https://www.fenixaid.org/articles/caught-in-a-loop-the-narrowing-access-to-asylum-in-greece-since-the-eu-turkey-statement>

CONTEXT UPDATE

- Due to systematic delivery of first instance decision via email, many applicants report that without legal assistance they are not able to file electronic applications before the Asylum Service: for example, applications for booking an appointment, requesting copies of their personal file and, very important, to change the personal data and contacts. If the latter is not completed, the Asylum Service could close their case.
- While there is a state run free legal aid scheme for the 2nd instance procedure, applicants are ill-informed and in reality, they have no clear idea as to the reasons for submitting an appeal or of the shortcomings of the procedure.
- Applicants report that there is no introduction to the procedure of an admissible subsequent application.
- Access to health, social security, welfare allowances have been problematic without legal aid assistance.
- Beneficiaries of international protection (BIPs) report that they have not been informed of the procedure for booking an appointment for finger prints at the local police station. This is the initial requirement for receiving a resident's ID.

The closure of government-funded housing schemes and of Eleonas Camp is cause for serious concern, particularly for the more vulnerable having been to date provided with housing in apartments outside the RICs.

PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES

A Board Meeting was held on 15th June 2022 in preparation for the Annual General Meeting (AGM) to discuss and review the forward strategy and budget for the period July to December 2022. Forwarded in advance to all participants invited to the AGM held on 27th June 2022, after some clarifications and discussion, the forward strategy and budget were duly approved.

CONTEXT UPDATE

INFORMATION SERVICES

As shown by the contact log record, A.Ss.I.S.T. continues to respond to queries from many asylum seekers and BIPs. The number of queries received by A.Ss.I.S.T. office phones more than doubled this Quarter (from 2372 queries/requests for service to 5002). The number of contacts made by our lawyers to the authorities on behalf of our clients also increased significantly from 420 to 622 contacts. This may be attributed to a growing awareness of A.Ss.I.S.T.'s presence in Athens and an additional helpline operating in Athens.

Client Contact Log (Office)

From April to June 2022

5002

Text Messages Sent

9

Average Daily Contacts

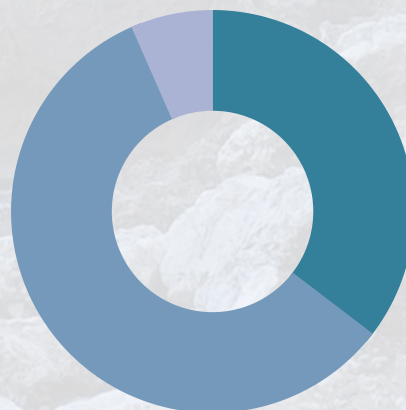
Contact Log with Greek Authorities (AGLs)

From April to June 2022

Visits: 41

Emails: 361

Phone calls: 220



Four Q&A sessions led by A.Ss.I.S.T. lawyers were held at the request of organisations in Athens in May and June 2022.

With the new law: Law No. 4939/2022 *"Ratification of the Code of Reception for the reception, the international protection of third country nationals and stateless persons and the temporary protection in case of mass influx of displaced foreigners"* came into force on 10 June 2022, A.Ss.I.S.T. must defer the recommencement of Information Sessions as anticipated. All audio-visual presentations need to be reviewed in light of any changes identified within this new Law and additions may also be required. This will mean considerable work for the whole Team: review of the legislation by the lawyers, their recommendations implemented by other Team members, scripts and voiceovers amended and the translations and voice overs in 5 languages redone.

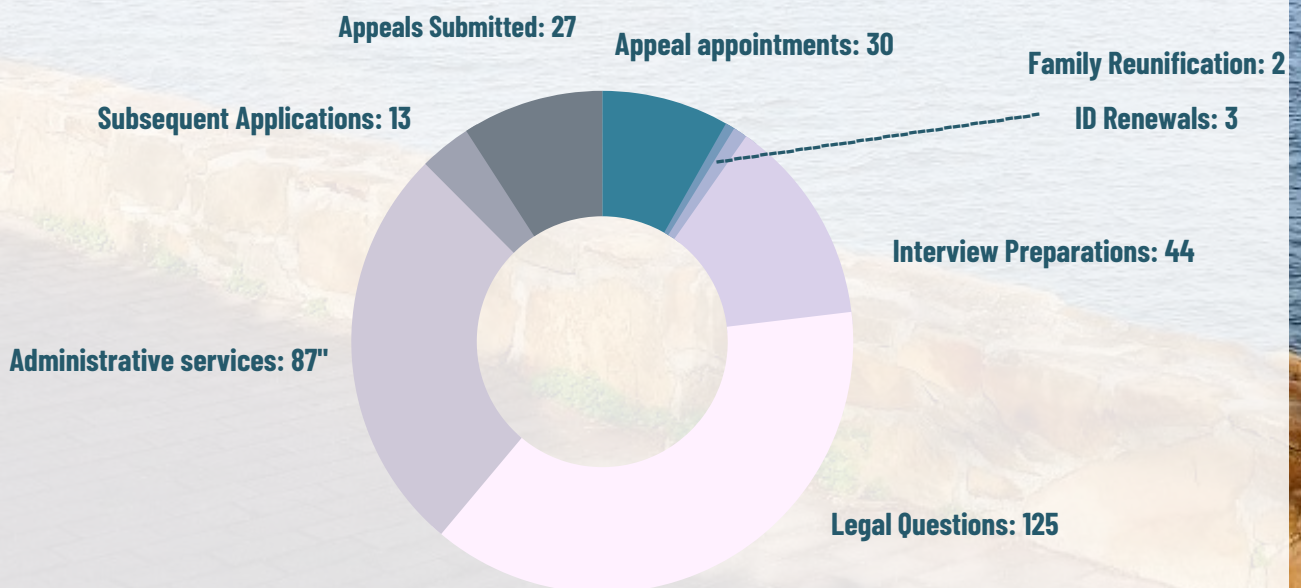
An in-house workshop led by the lawyers with the participation of the whole Team, lawyers, administrative staff and interpreters. Some VLAs who continue to offer their services for interview preparation in emergencies will also be invited to attend. It is essential that all Team members are aware of current and accurate information prior to delivering A.Ss.I.S.T. services.

LEGAL AID

From April to June 2022, the number of Athens-based consultations rose from 61 to 246 with an increased number of referrals also from other sites in Greece, from 4 to 29 consultations. There was also an increase in the number of clients served and consultations increased significantly from the last Quarter: from 158 consultations (January to March 2022) to 329 consultations (April to June 2022). This can be attributed to an increased awareness of A.Ss.I.S.T. services in Athens and more widely on the mainland, and to the contributions of an additional Greek lawyer and Client Services Coordinator in Athens. However, this caseload would not have been possible without the remote support and continued services of our Chios-based lawyers, the Office & Client Services Manager and our Team of on-call volunteer interpreters/translators. There was an increase in the number of Subsequent Applications, of Interview Preparations and of administrative services provided. While the number of appeals and legal question consults remained fairly stable. Within this three month period, A.Ss.I.S.T. served 269 clients from 24 nationalities requiring interpreter services in 13 languages other than Greek and English.

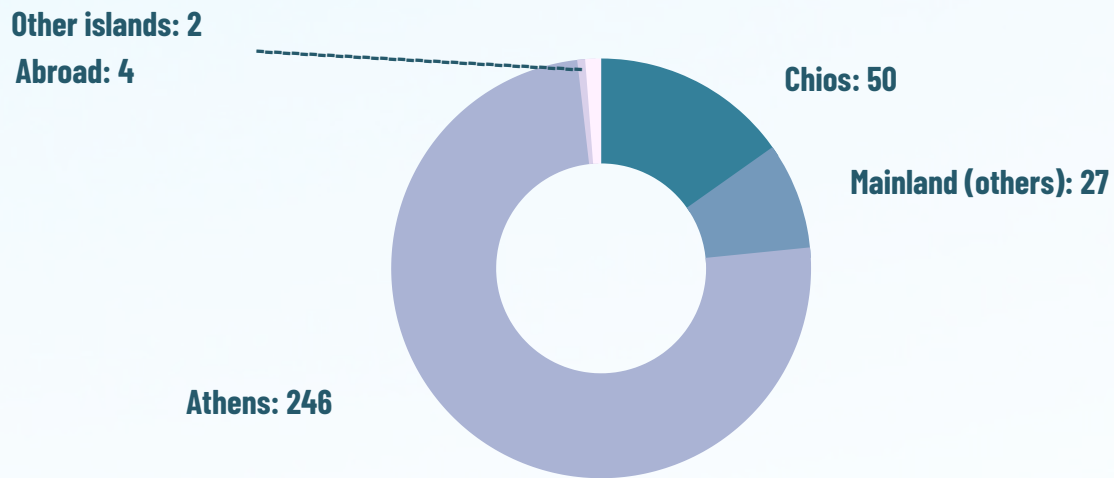
Consultations

From 329 consultations



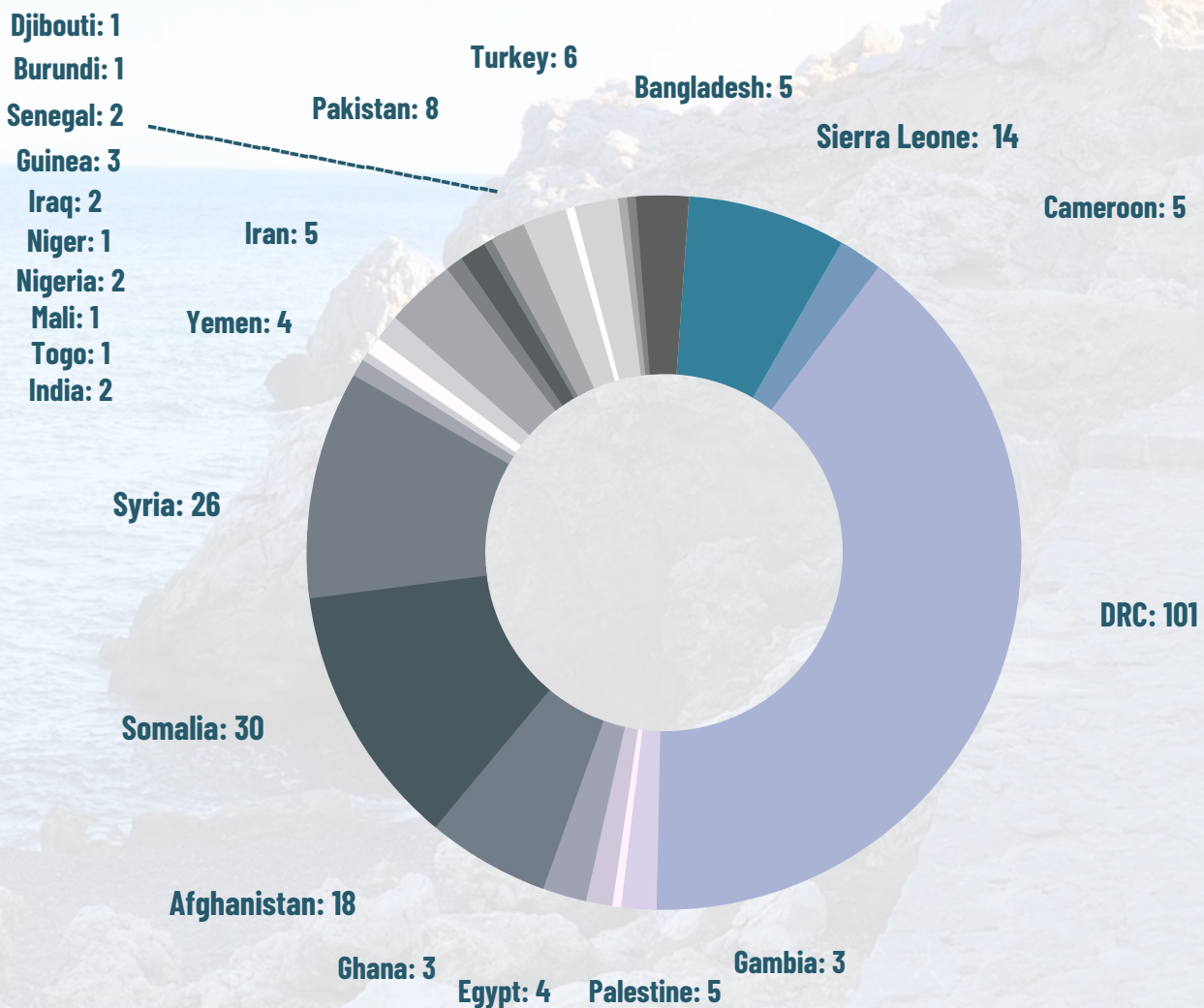
Geographical location of clients

From 329 consultations



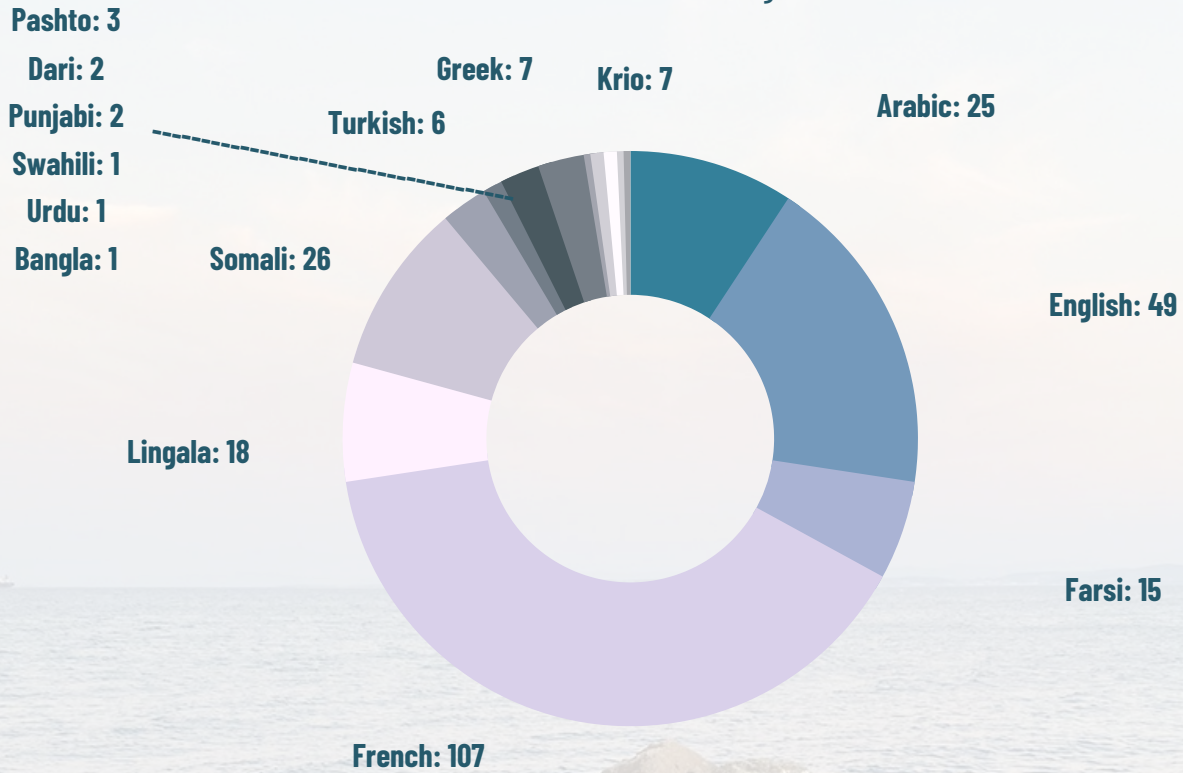
Nationality Breakdown

From a total of 269 clients across all age groups



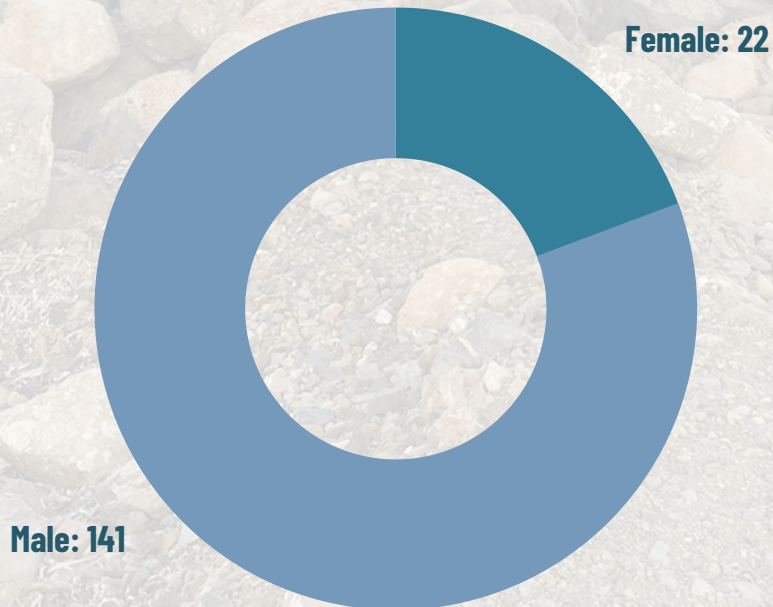
Language Breakdown

From a total of 269 clients attending consultations



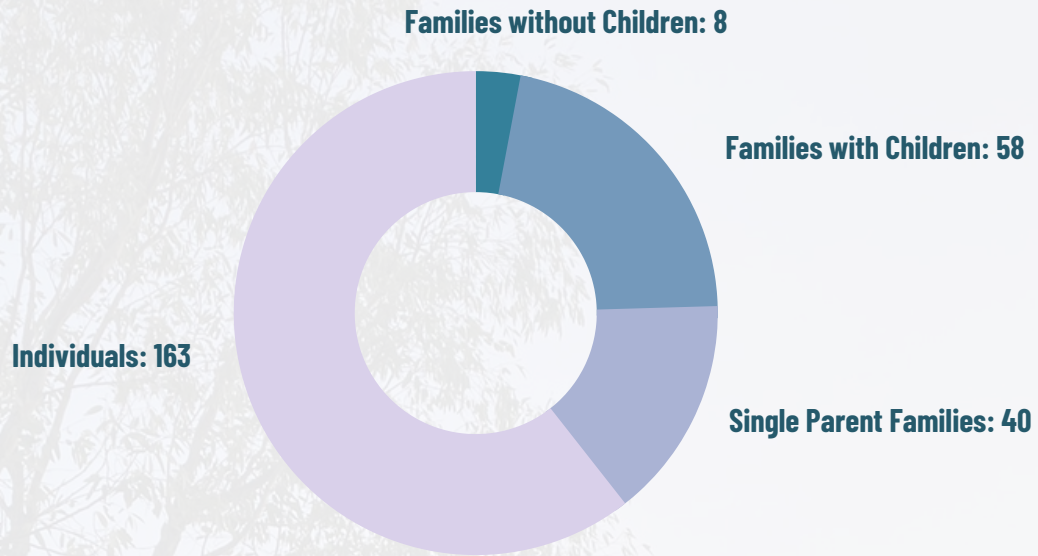
Gender Breakdown

From a total of 163 people attending as individuals (i.e, not as a part of a family unit)



Family Composition Breakdown

From a total of 269 clients attending consultations



THE TEAM

Emma O-Flaherty, volunteer interpreter (English-French) and coordinator of social media and publication design left Greece but continues to offer her services remotely.



Emma O'Flaherty



Mohamed Mohamed

One of our long-term volunteer interpreters (English-Arabic-Somali), Mohamed Mohamed has been appointed to a full-time paid position on Samos Island. Mohamed volunteered for over two years and he will be much missed.

Similarly, A.Ss.I.S.T. will lose the invaluable services of Maya Kerbellec, who, after one year of volunteering, was appointed to the new employee position of Office & Client Services Manager on a six month contract. To our chagrin, Maya has decided not to renew her contract and leaves towards the end of July. Maya's replacement will join the Team mid-July to assure a thorough handover of the position. At the end of June, Ms Melanie Mavrogiorgi, Coordinator - Athens resigned to take up another position. Melanie's replacement will also commence in mid-July 2022.



Maya Kerbellec

Two volunteers, both bilingual English/French and both with legal studies backgrounds will join the Team in July 2022. They will take up mixed duties of interpreters and information materials redevelopment and delivery. As always training will be provided after induction and orientation with the Team.

ATHENS-CHIOS CO-LOCATION PROJECT

Office space

Currently we have exclusive access to a private office within the premises of Safe Place Greece. The office is on the mezzanine floor with a small waiting area at the door and we have shared access to facilities on the ground floor. The Athens Team continues to have access every Friday to an office in the ANKAA Project with the possibility to book an office with advanced notice. A.Ss.I.S.T. is currently seeking independent office premises in central Athens.

Increased and expanded services to clients based in Athens and surrounds

The Athens-based Team members are now facilitating specific services for clients in Athens. For example, the requisite processing of documents (Powers of Attorney, submission of client documents to the authorities), the operation of an Athens-based enquiry line and, as appropriate, representing our clients directly with the authorities, police or asylum services. Under the above-mentioned project, it is proposed, subject to finding office premises to employ a Social worker to serve A.Ss.I.S.T. clients.

Networking & Meetings

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 network (national).

- Chios Coordination Group is currently limited to WhatsApp exchanges.
- On 3rd June in Chios and on 4th June in Athens, A.Ss.I.S.T. lawyers met the ASGI research teams.
- Mr. Pavlos Tomazos, represented A.Ss.I.S.T. at the UNHCR Seminar on Racism held in Chios on Friday, June 16th, 2022.

Team Members continue to maintain and strengthen our networks bearing in mind the diverse services much needed by asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection.

FUND RAISING

Funding opportunities in legal aid are limited when operating from within Greece and some of our regular small grant donors are now turning their attention towards the plight of refugees from Ukraine in eastern Europe. A.Ss.I.S.T. has been working on several grant applications, will be submitting several in July and September. A campaign on Global Giving Bonus Day, 20th July is ready to launch and the Legal Representative made some contacts through Choosehumanity in Switzerland for both awareness and fund raising.

Looking forward to

July

- New Office & Client Services Manager- Chios and Office & Clients Service Development Coordinator - Athens join the Team.
- Two volunteers with legal training and language skills join the Team.
- Renewal of AGL contracts confirmed for August 2022.
- Audit 2021 complete.
- End of Year 2021 Report published on website.
- Quarter 2 Report ready and posted on website (July 2022).
- Information materials review and amendments begin.
- Search for Independent office premises begins late July if funds available.

August

- In-house workshops: Law 4939/2022 and “Do’s and Don’ts Interpreting for Lawyers”.
- Renewal of Athens lawyer and Coordinator contracts (pending funds available by September 2022).
- Some Team members may take summer break.
- Recruitment of Social Worker if office premises available.

September

- Information Sessions may commence in Athens and Chios.
- Athens lawyer contract extended for 3 months (ACCP grant funds).

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