



2020 End of Year Report

Table of Contents

- 2. Letter from the President
- 5. Achievements (2020 only)
- 8. Statistics
- 10. Operations
- 11. Challenges
- 12. Partners & Donors
- 13. Financial Statement (unaudited) 2020

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Members, Volunteers, and Friends 2020 was a difficult year for everyone!

For those seeking international protection in Greece much more so.

New laws on migration

A new law on Migration came into force on January 01 2020 (Law 4636/2019), followed by Law 4686/2020 amending Laws 4636/2019, Law 4375/2016, and other laws relating to migration; and inevitably leading to changes in regulations and procedures. The new Laws place additional obligations on the asylum seekers, yet the information available to them remained limited. Language is a major barrier to the provision of accurate and timely information; it is essential to permit asylum seekers to exercise their rights and meet their obligations. Under-resourced services respond to the number of applicants for the provision of both information and legal aid compounded, and continue to compound and exacerbate, these issues.

The impact on the local community

It is also important to remember that, for the people of Chios, the local community, who have been hosting asylum seekers now for five years, with

- the continued high unemployment and unresolved economic crisis,
- a mediocre year of tourism in 2019,
- and a very bad year for tourism in 2020 due to COVID19,

they too faced severe economic difficulties in 2020. With national lockdown currently indefinite in 2021, many small businesses have had to close and the economic situation for many has deteriorated significantly. Many within the Chios community empathize with the asylum seekers, some torn between the unacceptable treatment and the recognition of the economic benefit of an additional population present on the Island and the desire to remain the homogenous Greek community prior to the 'refugee crisis'.

For those volunteering here, it is important also to show solidarity with the community within which we live. I thank the local people, businesses, and services providers, who have provided their goods and services to A.Ss.I.S.T.



Interview preparations

The COVID19 lockdown

In March 2020, with the arrival of the COVID19 pandemic and the first national lockdown beginning in the middle of the month, A.Ss.I.S.T. international volunteers returned to their home countries. Several of them continued to work with us remotely.

Our team of interpreters was also working remotely from their places of residence: some in Chios town, others while still living in Vial. From mid-March to July 2020, again due to COVID19 with no volunteers available, A.Ss.I.S.T. had no dedicated administrative support, yet despite this challenge, services continued through the efforts of the Team as a whole.

A.Ss.I.S.T. services continued uninterrupted throughout the year via WhatsApp video calls to applicants seeking our assistance with only short periods when applicants could come to the office. This continues as lockdown restrictions have been in place since November 2020 and are still in place.

Two Greek lawyers on contract

Due to a grant from SolidariTee UK, a network of volunteers dedicated to fighting for long-term change in the refugee crisis and raising funds to support legal aid services for asylum seekers and refugees, A.Ss.I.S.T. was able to contract the services of two local Associate Greek lawyers with significant experience in Migration Law from July to September 2020.

In the current context on Chios Island, A.Ss.I.S.T. services are essential and those of the Greek lawyers vital to many applicants. Only Greek lawyers can submit appeals in response to a rejected application. Their knowledge and familiarity with the Greek legal system, judiciary, and access to the Greek authorities – asylum services, courts, police, and public services generally – has expanded and improved our services by providing our volunteer Legal Advisors with significant support.

Yet we continue to struggle to raise the requisite funds to retain their services. In 2020, with further support from ChooseLove, we managed to retain the services of one AGL from July to December 2020 with only a fortnight break between contracts. Funds did not permit the retention of the second lawyer for the last six weeks of 2020.

The Team

In July 2020, a local Greek volunteer with extensive experience working with asylum seekers and refugees also joined Team as Client Services/Office Manager scheduling all appointments, coordinating the Team's work, and working through our interpreters, responding to the many enquiries received daily on our office mobile WhatsApp number.

The commitment of our volunteers – legal advisors (EU qualified lawyers), interpreter/translators, administrators, and of our two Associate Greek lawyers to providing services to applicants for international protection is nothing less than extraordinary. The team dynamic that has developed well justifies the word 'Team' being in the Organisation's title: it has been a pleasure and a privilege to observe and oversee their work.

Fundraising

A.Ss.I.S.T. continues to benefit from the services of our remote volunteer fund-raising Team led by our Treasurer, Ms. Jo Chan, whose services in 2020 were above and beyond those of a Board member. The fund-raising Team made significant contributions securing grants, raising funds from crowd-funding campaigns, and managing a particularly successful campaign through Global Giving. Raising funds for information services and legal aid is particularly arduous in the context of the Refugee Crisis' as the basic material needs of people living in camps raise more immediate public support, understandably so.

Many people across the European Union are not aware that information services in their own languages and legal aid is vital to those seeking international protection in Greece and in the E.U. more widely. For this reason, A.Ss.I.S.T. struggles from month to month to maintain funding to the level required to support all our services.

Thank you to our partners and donors

I would like to thank our partners and donors, every private individual and every organisation, not only for their donations but for the solidarity this shows with the applicants for international protection and the trust that they place in A.Ss.I.S.T.

I also wish to acknowledge the hard work that individuals do, to earn and still give, and the hard work put in by the donor-organisations, many of whom are also volunteer organisations, in advocating and raising funds so A.Ss.I.S.T. can provide our services.

Special thanks to Choosehumanity-Switzerland and their President, Ms. Mary Wenker, to ChooseLove/Help Refugees, to Donate4Refugees for their constant support, to the Indigo Team for their invaluable assistance in the recruitment of volunteers, and to SolidariTee-UK for their financial support and the opportunities offered to A.Ss.I.S.T. to inform their network of the situation of asylum seekers on Chios. Finally, and as importantly, thank you too for the invaluable cooperation on the ground in Chios to Action for Education and Offene Arme e.V. – together we can achieve more!

Without the hard work and contributions of all of those mentioned above and too-many-to-name individual donors and supporters, A.Ss.I.S.T. would not be able to deliver our services.

It has been a particularly challenging year – sadly there is no sign that things will improve for the applicants, for the refugees, and for the local community in the near future. So, we wait, we serve as best we can in the hope for a brighter future.

Thank you, Team! And thank you too to all those, near and far, whose many and diverse contributions have assured the provision of A.Ss.I.S.T. services.

Sheila Cross
President & Legal Representative.
30th of April 2021.

ACHIEVEMENTS

SERVICES

Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the Team was to maintain legal aid services throughout the Year of COVID19 and the best efforts made to continue providing information to asylum seekers and refugees.

Prior to the first national COVID19 lockdown in Greece, that began on 13 March 2020, A.Ss.I.S.T. had a full complement on the ground in Chios: three Volunteer Legal Advisors (VLAs), an office manager and eight interpreters on call.

INFORMATION SERVICES

From mid-January to early February, prior to the COVID19 pandemic, Information Sessions were suspended due to local demonstrations against the construction of the closed reception centre on Chios. Security measures prevented applicants for international protection leaving the Vial RIC to come to our office in town.

Prior to and post these initial restrictions, Information Sessions continued every weekday with a roster of language groups to cater to demand until Friday, 13 March 2020, when in compliance with directives to protect the community from COVID19, these were suspended.

Despite the many disruptions, A.Ss.I.S.T. held 30 Information Sessions attended by 257 asylum seekers, most of whom were resident in the Vial RIC.

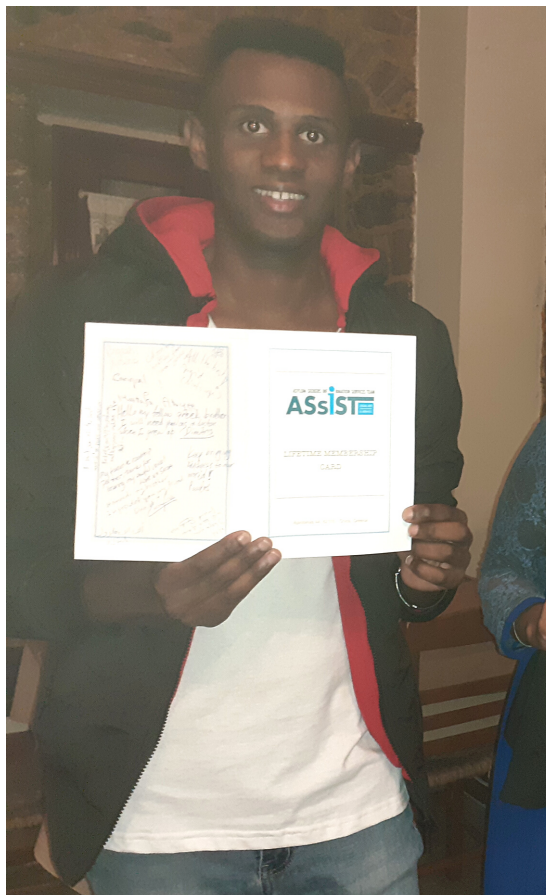
Information Sessions were presented in two parts:

Part A: Legal procedures and processes;

Part B: Documents, and government and NGO services available to asylum seekers on Chios.

As the timing of sessions and bus schedule prevented participants arriving back in the RIC in time for lunch distribution, refreshments (tea and biscuits) provided by Offene Arme e.V. and lunch provided by the Chios People's Kitchen were served.

At the end of each Session, participants were requested to complete 'client feedback' forms. Client feedback was very positive: the main criticism was that the room where our sessions are held is too small!





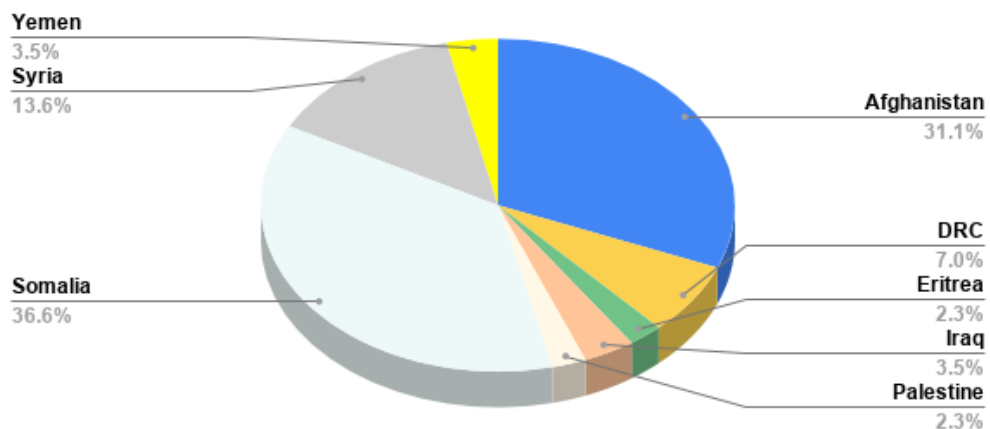
Training Room Workshops and Information Sessions (max 12 participants).

(NB. A.Ss.I.S.T.'s Code of Conduct prohibits the taking and publishing of photos of asylum seekers in which they can be recognised.)

At the request of other community organisations, our VLAs ran eight legal clinics at other local venues and several information sessions were also given to both volunteers and beneficiaries of these organisations.

2020 January-March: Information Session participants.

Totally 257 clients



From March to December 2020, it was not possible to hold group sessions due to restrictions of movement placed on the residents of Vial RIC and/or COVID19 restrictions in place for the whole community.

Throughout 2020, A.Ss.I.S.T. continued to provide information via our WhatsApp broadcast groups in eight languages, which included information bulletins related to government announcements, government and NGO services available, COVID19 precautions, and news on changes to laws and regulations. The A.Ss.I.S.T. office continued to respond to queries on the designated WhatsApp number via voice and text duly translated from and to English by our dedicated team of volunteer interpreter/translators.

Appointments with our VLAs, and in the second half of 2020 also with our Associate Greek Lawyers (AGLs), were scheduled through our office WhatsApp line.

LEGAL AID

After closure of our office in mid-March, A.Ss.I.S.T. VLAs returned to their respective home countries.

From 23rd March 2020, together with our Chios-based volunteer interpreters team, the VLAs now based in Athens, Brussels, Marseilles, Rotterdam and Salzburg continued to provide legal services: preparing applicants for international protection for the interview, the key factor in the application procedure, and responding to legal questions. A protocol for remote interview procedures via video calls was developed to assure the confidentiality and confidence of the applicants.

The statistics for Legal Aid are divided into two semesters. The first semester, A.Ss.I.S.T. benefited from the legal services of VLAs only. The availability and number of VLAs varied throughout the year due to the work commitments of remote volunteers and the difficulty in recruiting VLAs to come to Chios until the final quarter of 2020. From September to December 2020, a total of 4 VLAs were in Chios for varying periods of time, two AGLs were recruited, one contracted for 5 months and one for 4 months, and our volunteer interpreter team remained fairly stable in numbers and in the coverage of the requisite languages.

Interview Preparations

These are 'mock' interview sessions to replicate what the applicant can expect to be asked at the real and critical interview with the Asylum Services. Interview preparations can take from 2.5 or 3 hours to up to 8 or 9 hours (two sessions) depending on the complexity of the case.

Legal Questions

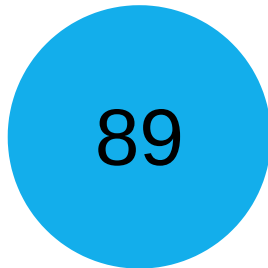
These are consultations to respond to specific legal questions. Normally, a legal question consultation lasts no longer than one hour. Given the numerous changes to Greek Migration Law in 2020, many of the legal question consultations were referred to our AGLs.

Appeals

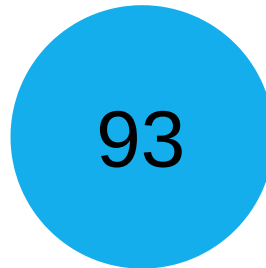
Only our AGLs can write appeals. To do so, with due diligence, requires accessing and reading the applicant's file. Hence a Power of Attorney is required to receive the file and to submit the Appeal Memorandum on behalf of the client. An appointment with the client follows reading the file to explain to the client the reasons for the rejection of their application, to discuss the case and permit the applicant to understand and contribute to the reasons put forward in the appeal. The appeal is then written, which must be in Greek and then is submitted to the Asylum Services within 10 days of the applicant being notified of the rejection of their application. Again, depending on the complexity of the case, an appeal may take two to three days for the lawyer to complete. The applicant must also present themselves at the Asylum Service to sign an Act of Appeal to complete the appeal process.

STATISTICS

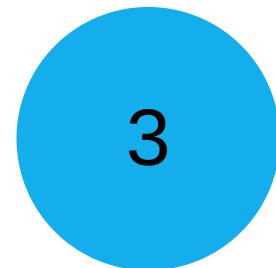
SEMESTER ONE LEGAL AID



Clients who were prepared for interview



Clients receiving responses to legal questions



Appeals submitted by Associated Greek Lawyers

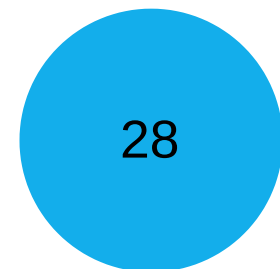
SEMESTER TWO LEGAL AID



Clients who were prepared for interview



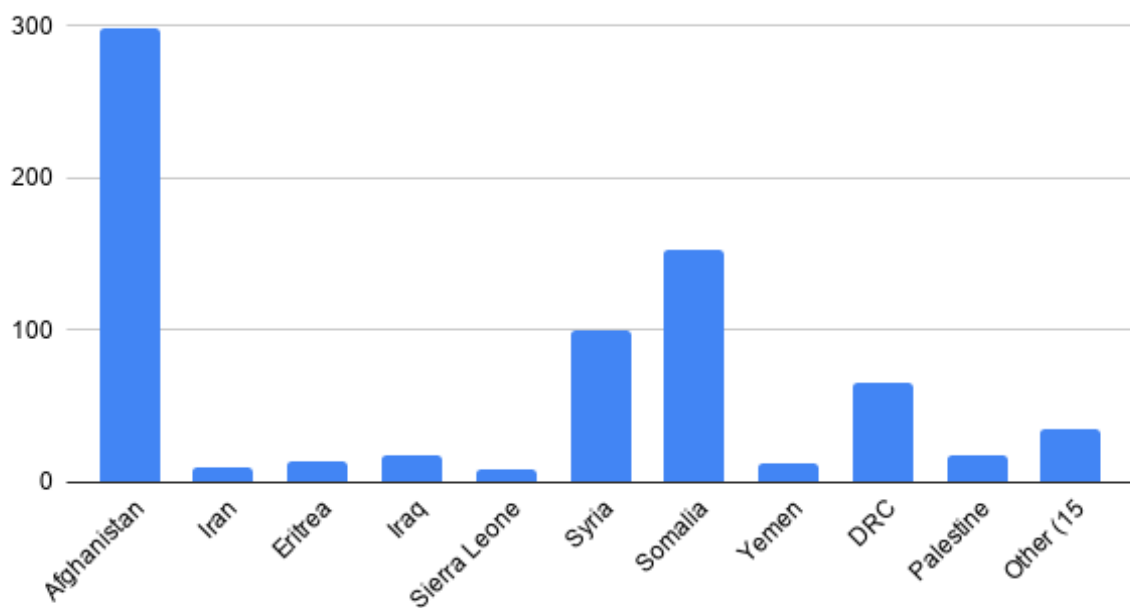
Clients receiving responses to legal questions



Appeals submitted by Associated Greek Lawyers

2020 Clients by nationality

729 clients - 25 nationalities - 12 languages



There were two periods when the A.Ss.I.S.T. office in the town centre was open by appointment only and strict practices for COVID19 prevention remained in place (24 July to 13 August and 28 August to 14 October 2020). Thanks to the commitment of our volunteer interpreters, the A.Ss.I.S.T. office phone continued throughout the year to respond to non-legal queries from asylum seekers in 7 to 8 languages to refer them to A.Ss.I.S.T. lawyers for legal questions and to make appointments for interview preparation.

With the announcement of new on-line services for asylum seekers in July 2020, A.Ss.I.S.T. offered assistance to asylum seekers to complete on-line forms announced on <http://asylo.gov.gr/en/>. A.Ss.I.S.T. team members received training to assist asylum seekers to complete these forms, to assist asylum seekers and refugees with applying for tax numbers, tax accounts and to inform them of the IOM-HELIOS programme, an integration, housing and financial assistance program funded by the European Union and implemented by the IOM. These services were ad-hoc as best, due to the many periods of office closure during the year.



OPERATIONS

Administrative support

Our long-term office manager returned to her home in early February, and her replacement left in mid-March 2020. From March to June 2020, the Team depended on a volunteer Coordinator, who also fulfilled the role of interpreter/translator (Somali) for scheduling of appointments and some administrative tasks, while overall management and administration fell to the Legal Representative. From July onwards, a local volunteer joined the Team to provide additional administrative support.

A.Ss.I.S.T. Remote Fund-Raising Team.

Based in the UK, in Athens, and then Macau, our remote volunteer fund-raising Team made significant contributions to social media, report design as well as securing funds.

Several independent supporters also ran successful crowd-funding campaigns making significant contributions to our, often precarious, funding base.

Website management

Our 'webmaster', also based in the UK, and our longest serving volunteer, continued to manage, update and improve our website.

Recruitment

This is an on-going activity due to the potential high turnover of volunteers.

Policy development

Protocols for COVID19 prevention measures both in the office and at home, and 'what to do in the event of an earthquake' were developed and distributed to the Team.

A Safeguarding Policy was also developed.

GOOD NEWS

For our volunteer interpreters there was good news! Several volunteer interpreters have moved into full-time employment both on Chios and elsewhere in Greece. During the second semester, five of our volunteer interpreters received refugee status! They too will move forward, we hope, to employment and new, secure and successful futures.

CHALLENGES

Changes in the laws, and in the circumstances imposed by the pandemic, posed the greatest challenges to applicants for international protection and hence to the provision of services to them.

New Migration Laws

The new Greek law on International Protection (Law No.4636/19) came into force on January 01, 2020 introducing many changes. Several Ministerial Decisions were gazetted. Since November 1st 2019 when the new law was gazetted, A.Ss.I.S.T. worked to assure preparation: up-dating material for Information Sessions and studying the new requirements. This new law placed greater responsibility on the applicants for international protection, with increased obligations and significantly limiting the opportunity for applicants arriving in 2020 to seek clarification of information or legal aid within the time frames set for the asylum services to process applications. Of even greater significance to the asylum seekers, was the passage of a second new Migration law, Law 4686/2020, which came into force on 12 May 2020. This amended provisions of many previous laws, including amending provisions of Law 4636/2019 which only came into force on January 01, 2020. Changes in the legislation and consequent revisions of regulations renders the legal framework more complicated, and more difficult for the asylum seekers to fully understand their rights and obligations.

These new laws require that new arrivals be detained, at least for the first 25 days, with discretion to extend the period of detention. There is no detention facility on Chios Island. Government plans were announced to construct a 'closed' reception facility 17 km from Chios town, which led to violent demonstrations by the local community against riot police sent to Chios from the mainland. The security situation in town disrupted our services. In Vial RIC, Asylum Services ceased from 16th March 2020. Medical registrations and transfers continued, while due to COVID19 restrictions, very few decisions were notified.

The Pandemic: COVID19

April to June 2020 can best be described as the COVID19 Confusion Quarter. Lockdown on Chios Island commenced on 13 March 2020 to mid-May and restrictions of movement continued for various periods for the asylum seekers living in Vial RIC. There were no Asylum Services operating from mid-March to mid-May: no Information Point, no registrations, no interviews, and no application decisions notified. There were a few transfers to mainland Greece and limited allocation of housing for the most vulnerable in the RIC. Skeleton services continued to operate within Vial RIC: the Ministry of Health/SMH clinic, IOM services for unaccompanied minors and security services.

From July to September 2020, for various periods, restrictions of movement continued to be applied to the residents of Vial RIC. In late October, the Team was quarantined for two weeks, as a team member tested positive for COVID19. The quarantine period ended on the same day, 11 November 2020, as the second national COVID19 lockdown commenced. The A.Ss.I.S.T. Office has been closed to the public since late October 2020 as lockdown restrictions continued into 2021.

The long-term and later periodic closure of services led to delays in processing of applications: the postponement of interviews, often repeated re-scheduling and delays in the renewal of International Protection Identity Cards, hence lengthening an already long waiting period for asylum seekers in Vial RIC. Applicants arriving after January 2020 benefitted from the reduced timelines set in the new laws; those who arrived prior to 2020, however, were frustrated by continued longer waiting periods. Sadly, living conditions remained unchanged, access to many vital services were often interrupted, increasing the overall suffering of residents of Vial RIC.

With the closure of the Greece-Turkish border, there have been very few new arrivals on Chios Island since early March 2020. Deportations to Turkey ceased.

PARTNERS AND DONORS

Our partners and donors are often one and the same.

The support and warm cooperation that A.Ss.I.S.T. enjoyed from the very beginning with NGOs working on Chios and in the United Kingdom remain constant.



Action for Education (AFE) A.Ss.I.S.T. shared a bus service permitting our clients to come to town and return to Vial RIC free of charge when COVID19 restrictions permitted.



InDIGO UK - our partners in recruitment of volunteers. Many of our volunteers were referred to A.Ss.I.S.T. through their good services.



Offene Arme e.V.

Offene Arme e.V. – our cooperation remains strong and mutual.

Our key financial donor-partners to date include



Choosehumanity-CH



ChooseLove/HelpRefugees



Donate4Refugees U.K.



SolidariTee U.K.

and Hugs from Holland (no logo available)

Many private donors have been extremely generous directly or through crowdfunding campaigns. They are too many to name individually.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Financial Statement (Audited) 2020	
Income (AUDITED)	Euros
Individual Donations	€ 3 558,50
Corporate Donations	€ 0,00
Grants	
Choosehumanity	€ 8 487,09
ChooseLove	€ 15 050,00
Donate4Refugees	€ 7 220,16
Help Refugees	€ 1 400,00
Hugs from Holland	€ 200,00
Offene Arme e.V.	€ 1 800,00
SolidariTee	€ 16 105,73
Grants Total	€ 50 262,98
Events and Fundraising	€ 5 877,02
Membership Fees	€ 0,00
Interest Earned	€ 0,91
Total Funds available	€ 59 698,50
Expenses	Euros
Programmatic Activities	
Legal Services	€ 27 508,57
Translation Services	€ 517,76
Volunteer support (training, accommodation, etc)	€ 7 652,10
Beneficiary - transport *	€ 4 724,40
Beneficiary - Emergency costs	€ 245,00
Total Program Activities	€ 40 647,83
Overheads	
Office Running Costs	€ 5 351,32
Office supplies	€ 1 354,77
Management costs	€ 5 345,74
Total Overheads	€ 12 051,83
Total Expenses	€ 52 699,66
Income less expenses	€ 6 998,84
Balance held as at December 31 2019	€ 4 996,17
Balance of funds available 31 December 2020	€ 11 733,37
Cash balance as at 31 December 2020	€ 2 203,04
Bank balance as at 31 December 2020	€ 9 530,93
	€ 11 733,37
	€ 0,00
* includes bus transport costs Aug-Dec 2019.	



**THANK
YOU!**

ASYLUM
SEEKERS
INFORMATION
SERVICES
TEAM