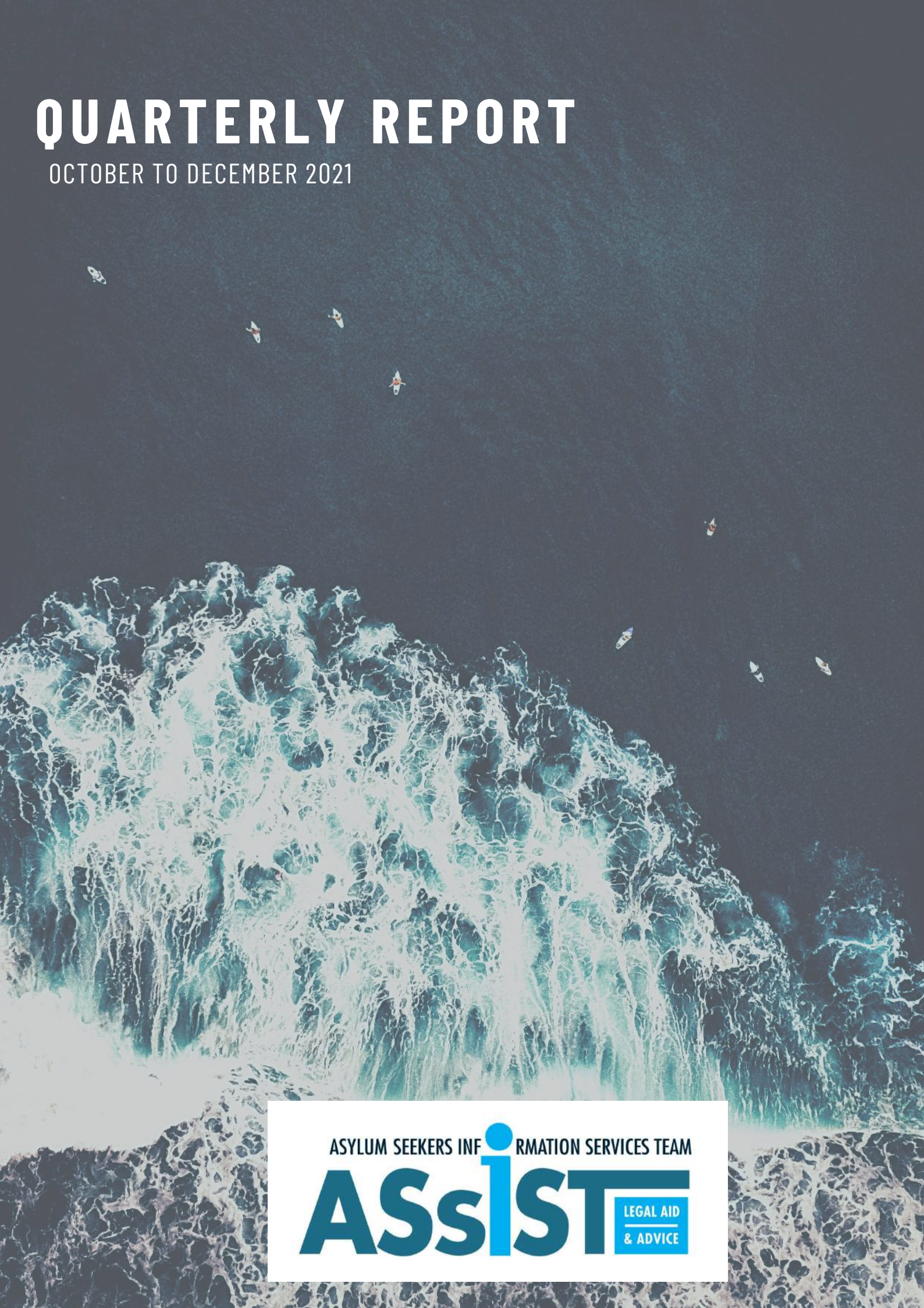


QUARTERLY REPORT

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2021



ASYLUM SEEKERS INFORMATION SERVICES TEAM

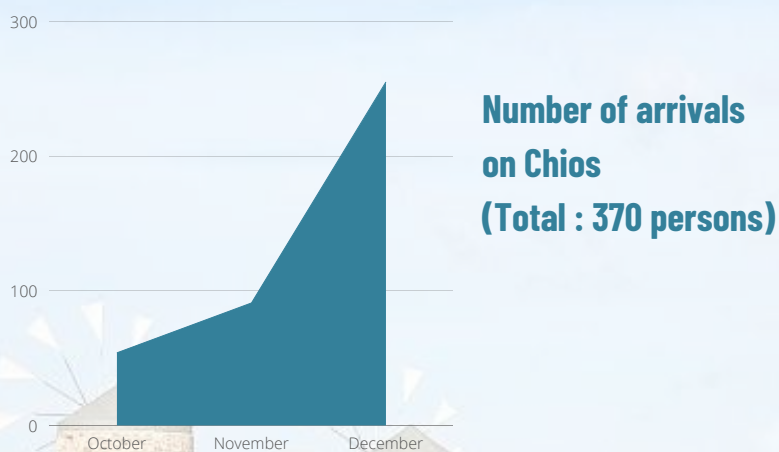
ASsIST

LEGAL AID
& ADVICE

A CHALLENGING CONTEXT: INCREASED NUMBERS OF NEW ARRIVALS AND PUSHBACKS.

A.Ss.I.S.T. 's decision to remain on Chios and to continue to work remotely together with the initiative to establish a presence in Athens appears to be a good strategy, at least insofar as indicated in the final quarter of 2021 with increased demand for our services in both locations.

During the last quarter of 2021, every month, the number of people arriving on Chios by boat from Turkey seeking international protection increased.



This time was marked by the tragic loss of life close to the shores of Chios and, sadly, by the loss of life amongst those seeking safety in Europe and who are opting for more dangerous routes bypassing the Aegean Islands towards Italy. Media reports of the Greek authorities pushing boats back to Turkey, even after the boats have landed on Greek shores, continue and there is growing evidence that thousands of people have been pushed back to Turkey. No doubt that this is why the authorities could affirm in the media last Quarter that they have effectively reduced the flows of migration by 95% on the islands.

The sea and land borders with Turkey remain officially closed which means that many of those whose applications for international protection have failed and their legal options are exhausted are either in detention or in limbo without papers and without any form of social support.

OUR SERVICES

The number of consultations this quarter increased significantly from 114 to 158, referrals from Athens more than tripled, while consultations with Chios based clients increased by 30% and there was a slight increase also in the number of referrals from elsewhere in Greece. Interview preparations doubled, appeals and subsequent applications increased by 50%. AGLs interventions with the authorities is commensurate with the increased caseload. As previously stated, the increased caseload reflects the increase in the number of arrivals seeking international protection on Chios. Increased referrals from Athens and mainland, we hope, is symptomatic of successful networking and partnering with other NGOs.

Client Contact Log (Office)

From October to December 2021

1727

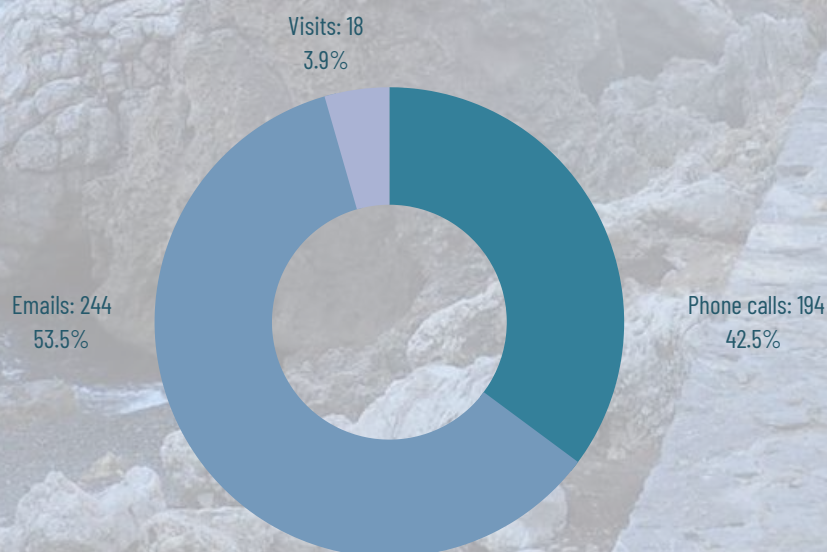
Text Messages Sent

8

Average Daily Contacts

Contact Log with Greek Authorities (AGLs)

From October to December 2021

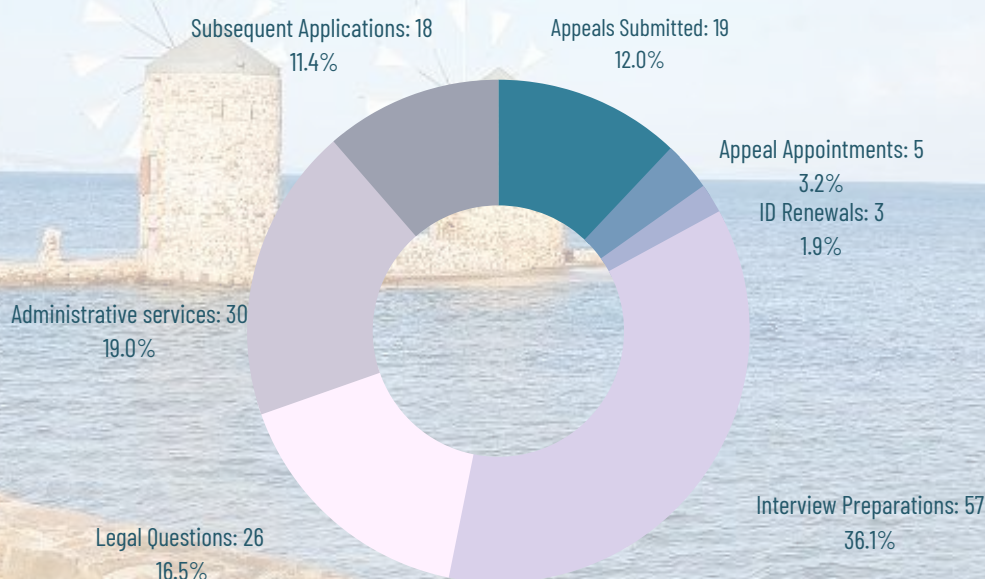


A.Ss.I.S.T. 's office help line continues to respond to enquiries on a daily basis (Monday to Friday), in the six main languages: Amharic, Arabic, English, Farsi, French, Lingala and Somali. Both text and voice messages are received, and responses given in the language of the messages received. Legal questions are referred to our AGLs and VLAs. Some questions require consultations with the lawyers.

Other enquiries receive responses in accordance to guidance given by the Legal Representative or by standard accepted responses. The Office and Client Services Manager, focal point for all client enquiries, has developed a spreadsheet documenting frequently asked questions, a useful tool for responding quickly and for training incoming volunteers. Appointments to consult with our VLAs and AGLs are also made via the office WhatsApp. The number of enquiries received are now captured in the Contact Log together with the number of approaches made by our AGLS to the authorities on behalf of A.Ss.I.S.T. clients

Consultations

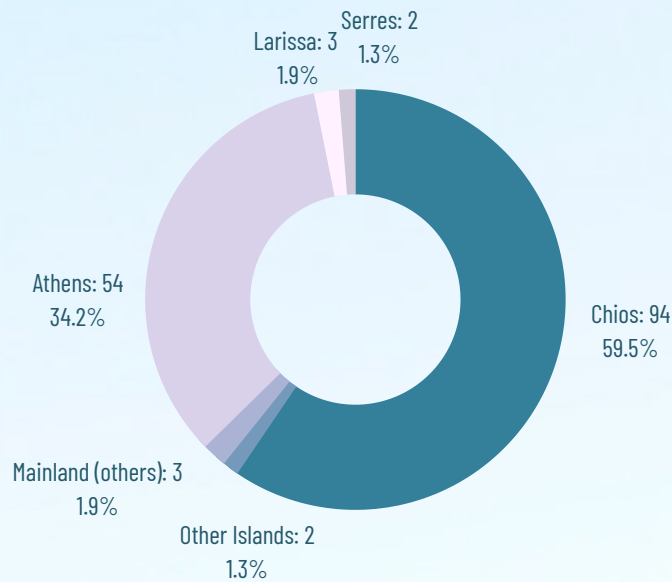
From 158 consultations



As our statistics illustrate over this reporting period, the number of legal consultations has increased over time, reflecting both the increase in the number of new arrivals requiring legal assistance and the growing number of referrals from elsewhere in Greece.

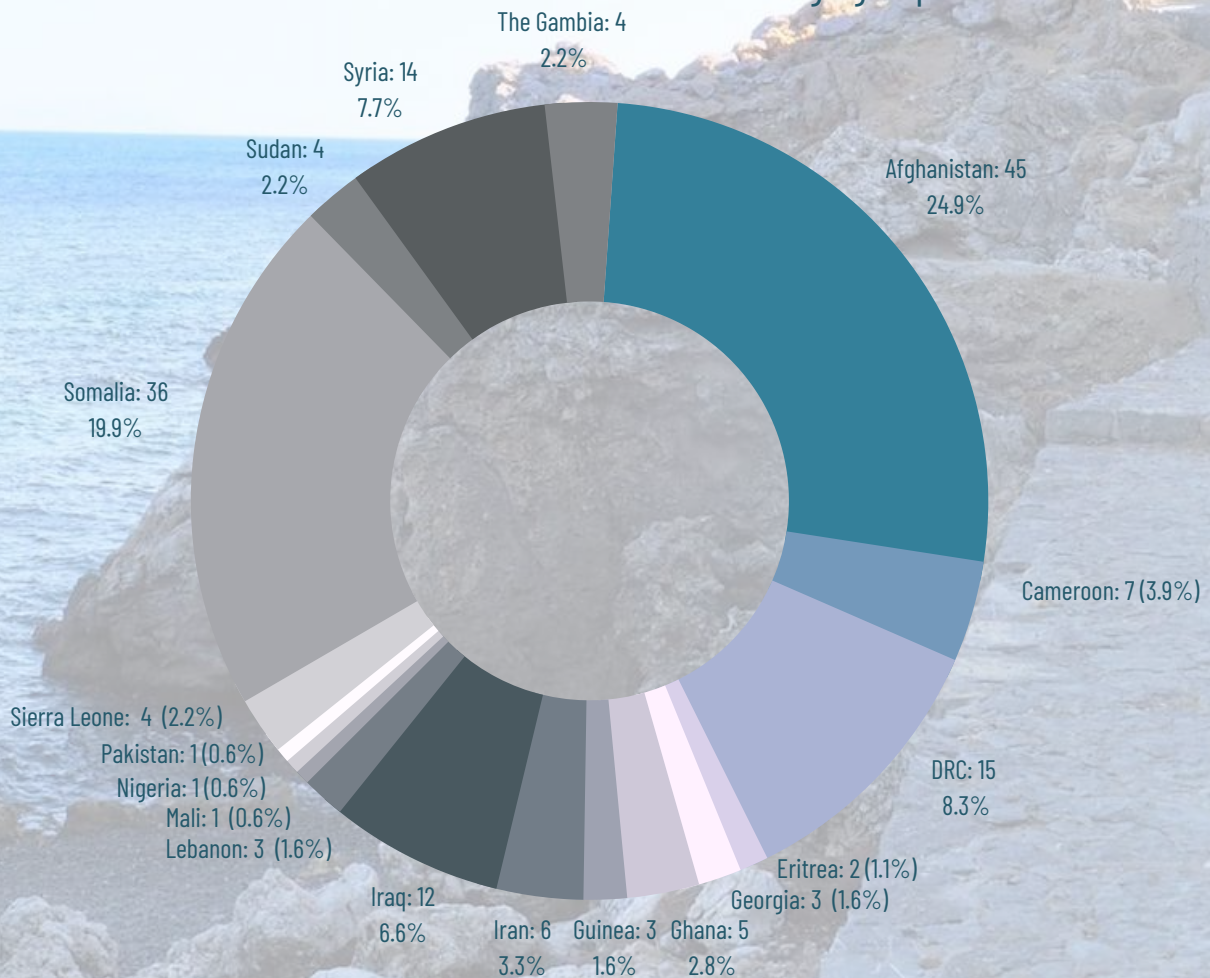
Geographical location of clients

From 158 consultations



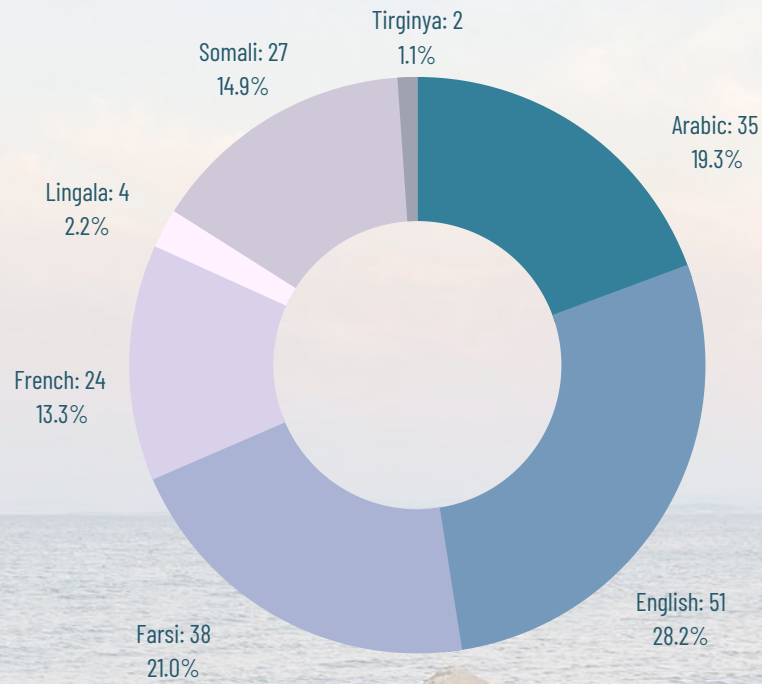
Nationality Breakdown

From a total of 181 clients across all age groups



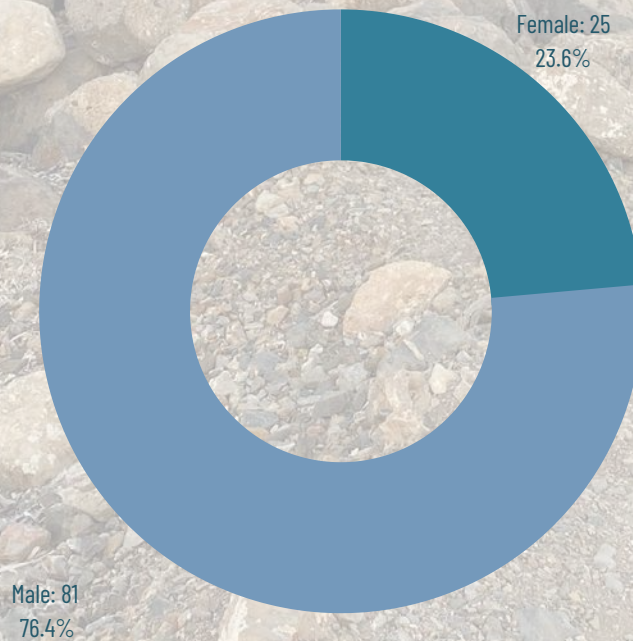
Language Breakdown

From a total of 181 clients attending consultations



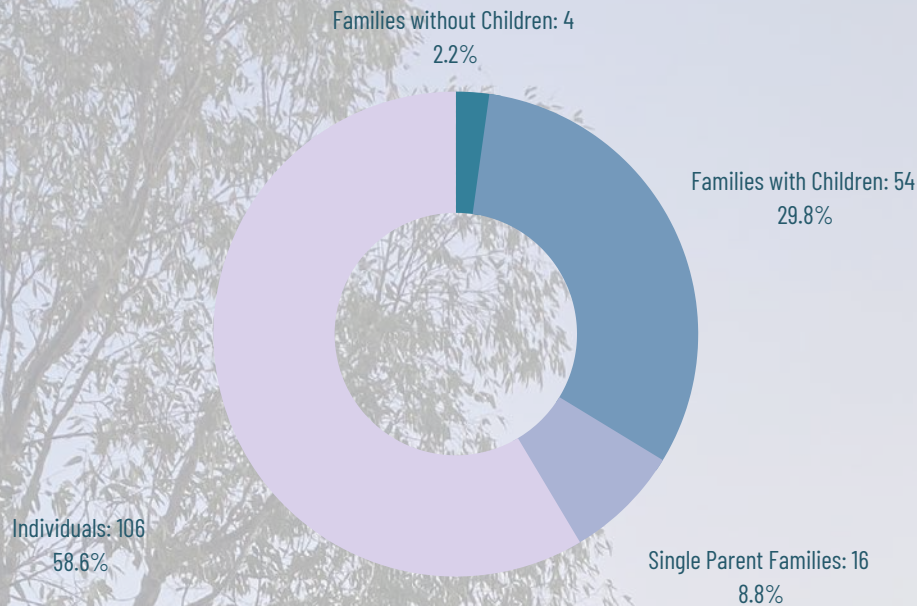
Gender Breakdown

From a total of 106 people attending as individuals (i.e, not as a part of a family unit)



Family Composition Breakdown

From a total of 181 clients attending consultations



Information Sessions - development of presentations

On 15 October, the AGLs led an in-house workshop to review the draft documents to be used as reference materials for the development of scripts for the Information Sessions that A.Ss.I.S.T. anticipates delivering in 2022. In early November, two foundation documents were completed. The first outlining the full application procedure applicable on the Islands and the second document with the requisite variations as applied to those arriving on the mainland. These documents serve as the legal reference documents for the script for information sessions to be delivered by video presentation. In November-December, the VLAs and Information Manager worked together on the content and design of the new, updated materials to cover the four main stages of the asylum application procedure.

On 13 & 14 December 2022, in-house workshops on the draft scripts for the Information Session presentations were held. All Team members were present to provide feedback on draft scripts for four presentations and two draft audio-visual presentations. All four presentations will be duly translated into the languages relevant to the applicants for, and beneficiaries of, international protection. Although included briefly in the above presentations, two more presentations on Subsequent Applications and Family reunification are proposed.

The development of these materials has been much slower than anticipated due to the fact that priority must be given to serving the clients in immediate need. Many of the legal aid services involve deadlines for clients (interviews and appeals) and there has been a steady increase in the demand for A.Ss.I.S.T.'s legal services, interview preparations and appeals.

Independent expertise will be available to A.Ss.I.S.T. in February 2022 to finalise English presentations before initiating the Language Team project. The services of a Consultant with the requisite legal expertise will ensure the timely completion of the scripts. The Language Team project will draw on the expertise and experience of all previous and current A.Ss.I.S.T. interpreters/translators. Teams of 2 to 4 people will be formed for each language group to work together on translation and quality assurance of the content in each language to be submitted for review by an independent language expert. A project proposal incorporating the independent legal expertise and the translations of the materials into 6 languages with an estimated budget of Euros 6,500 has been drafted ready for fundraising initiatives.

In January 2022, it is proposed to register residents from Vial RIC in focus groups / Q&A sessions in order to assure that new arrivals have the opportunity to receive information pending the finalisation of the above presentations.

Covid fines and legal aid

In October 2021, UNHCR requested that A.Ss.I.S.T. and other legal actors to appeal on behalf of new arrivals against *COVID19 fines of Euros 5000* being imposed for entering Greece without an authorised vaccination certificate. Based on the prior experience of our Greek lawyers to fight COVID19 fines in 2020, A.Ss.I.S.T. declined to provide this service. By December it was clear that A.Ss.I.S.T.'s decision was well founded. All appeals by other legal actors failed and will now be taken forward to the court at the cost of Euros 260.00 for court fees. A.Ss.I.S.T. cannot justify using donor funds on this procedure.

UNHCR also informed other legal actors that charges for illegal entry are being made against new arrivals and mobile phones confiscated. Until international protection is claimed formally and new arrivals are so registered they remain 'illegal immigrants'. The charges for illegal entry are based on Art. 82 of Law No, 3386/2005 and authorities can retain mobile phones legally on the basis that the 'illegal immigrant' or applicant for international protection remains under investigation.

If mobile phones have not been returned to them, then, if international protection is granted, A.Ss.I.S.T. lawyers can approach the police to have them returned.

According to our contacts on Lesvos, Samos and the mainland, these fines are not issued and criminal charges are not laid. Apparently, and to our knowledge, these practices are on Chios only.

Appeals

Since January 2021, our AGLs have submitted 86 appeals: of which 16 failed and 20 succeeded. The remainder of appeals are pending recording or decisions. Our Associate Greek lawyers have done an amazing job.

Guardianship and Custody

In November, there were several cases of single parents seeking legal advice and aid to receive legal custody or guardianship of their children. This is a procedure required in order to receive Greek resident IDs and travel documents. The cost involved ranges from Euros 250 to just under Euros 1,000. There are legislated costs involved in such cases: under government regulations, our AGLs are required to charge fees separate to their contracts and other costs are those of the notary and the court.

Subsequent applications.

With yet another change in Asylum Services procedures, A.Ss.I.S.T. AGLs can no longer book appointments for applicants being supported for Subsequent Applications in Athens. Appointments now must be made by the applicant only and this via Skype. Skype services with the Asylum Services have been notoriously inaccessible.

The AGLs briefed some interested parties via videolink responding to queries related to Subsequent Applications and clarifying the requirements for their submission. It was agreed that A.Ss.I.S.T. AGLs would examine cases and provide a legal opinion as to whether requirements to proceed with a subsequent application are met. This is, however, time consuming for each case, as the lawyer needs to have full access to the file and review all documents pertaining to the case. Aware that few legal aid actors are doing subsequent applications, A.Ss.I.S.T. will accept cases in accordance with our capacity: interview preparations and appeals have precise and short deadlines and therefore will continue to have priority, subsequent applications have no time limits.

Meet our team!



From left to right:
Mohamed: interpreter
Maya: Office & Client
Services Manager
Leona : Legal Advisor

From left to right:
Delphine : Legal Advisor
Florence : Information
Manager



Afghanistan related developments.

In late October, the International Bar Association (IBA) based in London approached A.Ss.I.S.T. and three of our partner legal aid organisations to provide legal aid to the 106 women judges, lawyers and journalists and their families who had arrived recently in Athens on 60 day visas issued at the behest of the President of Greece. The cases of these evacuees are not as straightforward as those of Afghan new arrivals on Chios as many of these clients had initiated procedures for asylum in diverse EU countries, Australia and the US before the fall of Kabul and their evacuation.

By end-November 2021, IBA had referred 4 Afghan women judges and their families to A.Ss.I.S.T. for legal consultations.

A.Ss.I.S.T. operates on a first come, first served basis with appointments postponed only when the specific client's case has no firm deadline. A.Ss.I.S.T. does not discriminate by nationality or 'high profile' requests received. All cases are accepted based on our capacity to provide legal aid; the availability of our lawyers is monitored via calendar appointments. Some forms of legal assistance have firm deadlines and priority must be given to clients' immediate needs: interview preparations and appeal submissions have clear deadlines, while, for example, subsequent applications have no specific deadlines until accepted by the Asylum Services.

Following recent developments in Afghanistan, the AGLs are also reviewing all case records for Afghan clients as there may now be sound arguments for Afghans to counter some negative decisions and for some clients to receive international protection by subsequent applications. AGLs will now make their recommendations as to which cases may proceed with subsequent applications.

COVID-19 continues...

In November 2021, the Greek government introduced **new COVID19 restrictions**. These new restrictions require all persons entering all public services to show an authorised vaccination certificate or a PCR negative test from an authorised provider. Most of our clients have not had access to a vaccination program and PCR tests are not free, on Chios, they cost Euros 8/test and on the mainland Euros 10/test.

A.Ss.I.S.T. decided that it was necessary to pay for authorised COVID19 tests @ Euros 8/test as, without a certificate to this effect, our clients cannot enter the Citizen Services Bureau to have Powers of Attorney authorised, or the police station to progress their IDs and other applications, or even the Asylum Services in order to sign an Act of Appeal. The tests are valid for 48 hours so, on some occasions, A.Ss.I.S.T. has had to pay for two tests for one client: Power of Attorney followed several days later with lodging an Act of Appeal. No other solution has been found to resolve this problem and allow legal requirements to go forward.

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

- Opening of our office in Athens;
- Re-introduction of Q&A sessions led by A.Ss.I.S.T. lawyers
- Completion of audio-visual materials for presentation at Information Sessions;
- Recruitment of at least 2 paid positions supported by several volunteers; and
- Growth and expansion of our services in Chios and in Athens.
- Publication of our End of Year Report 2021.

We look forward to your continued support.

Our renewed thanks to our Board and members, to our loyal donors and partners and last, but by no means least, to all our Team members!

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