

QUARTERLY REPORT

APRIL TO JUNE 2024

ASYLUM SEEKERS INFORMATION SERVICES TEAM

ASsIST

LEGAL AID
& ADVICE

At A.Ss.I.S.T., we understand that the essence of hope for our beneficiaries lies in the quality of the information and legal services we provide. Our efforts are dedicated to investing the funds we raise into providing information and legal services that offer more than just temporary relief. We aim to give hope for those engulfed in despair by listening, providing respectful and honest responses to their queries together with accurate information. This supports our beneficiaries to navigate their daily challenges within their own frameworks of possibility, encouraging them to seek and find the assistance they need and exercise their autonomy.

Hope is like peace. It is not a gift from God. It is a gift only we can give one another". - Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize, 1986.

PROGRAM AIMS

A.Ss.I.S.T. aims to provide support to asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Greece. Despite significant and increasing challenges, we continue to provide some essential assistance to these vulnerable populations.

The provision of free, accurate information services is an essential gateway to protect individuals' human rights: free information and access to other essential services - legal, social and welfare services.

A.Ss.I.S.T. operates on an inclusive basis, recognising special needs for specific vulnerable groups, and providing them with information and referring them to social and welfare services to meet their expressed needs.

The availability of our free information services operating in real time 'as things happen' provides essential support to asylum seekers and refugees.

Online and accessible five days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. supported by our cohort of on-call interpreters/translators, A.Ss.I.S.T. offers the following:

1. Someone online to receive and provide answers in their preferred language and, as appropriate, refer them to other free services.
2. A confidential and accessible source of information and support.
3. The chance to receive new information or compare with that already received supporting their autonomy in making informed decisions.
4. Information linking inquirers to services essential to their overall well-being.
5. The chance to provide feedback on our services and those to which they have been referred.

A.Ss.I.S.T. aims to

- respond within a 48-hour period, and much shorter response times for urgent requests.
- support asylum seekers and refugees in their understanding of the challenges that they face daily.

Our Client Services Handbook is available [here](#).

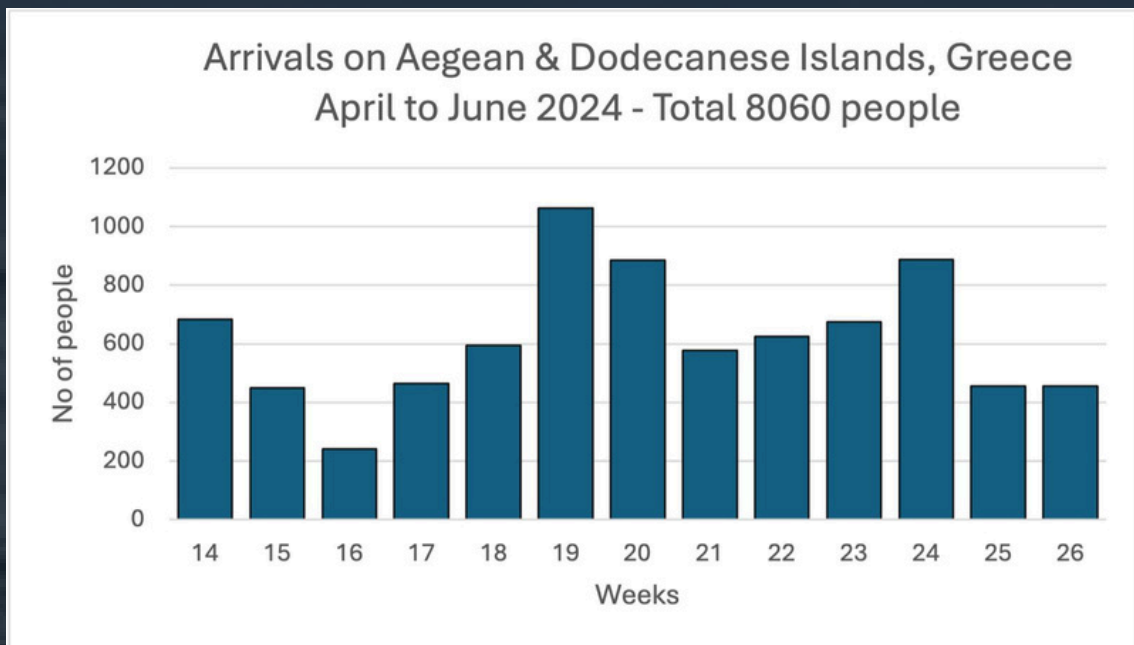
OUR SERVICE REGIONS

Throughout Greece with inquiries also received from those who left Greece for other EU countries and the United Kingdom. In 2023, our beneficiaries were based in 9 different geographical locations within Greece.

OUR FOCUS POPULATIONS

All persons who arrive in Greece seeking international protection; those who are recognised as refugees or have the protection of the State and those who are under threat of deportation.

According to UNHCR statistics from 01 April to 30 June 2024, 8060 people seeking asylum arrived by boat from Turkey on the north Aegean and Dodecanese Islands, of whom 784 arrived on Chios Island (Source: UNHCR).



Many others arrive via overland routes, but, to our knowledge, no reliable statistics are available for this period.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THOSE WE AIM TO SERVE

All persons seeking international protection in Greece must navigate a complex, opaque legal system, facing language and cultural barriers and continued hardship created by poor living conditions, pre-existing trauma exacerbated by limited welfare services, by uncertainty and imposed detention. Beneficiaries of international protection also face socio-economic and bureaucratic barriers to settling in Greece or in other European Union countries. Those whose legal options are exhausted are in limbo: subject to inhumane treatment and little understanding of what they may face when deported. Asylum seekers and refugees more generally face cultural and linguistic barriers as well as intersecting challenges like trauma, stigma, discrimination, disability, ill-health, and gender-based violence.

During this reporting period, **lack of reliable interpreter services** resulted in postponements of key interviews for many and, for some, sudden short notice of interviews brought forward. The latter often results in the applicant being unable to seek legal advice prior to the interview. Metadrassi, the Greek NGO, contracted to provide interpreter services, faced difficulties with funds, and has not paid interpreters for some months. Many interpreters were only part paid and still await payment of the full contract amount. There were suggestions that others would take over the provision of these services, but this has not happened as of end-June.

E-services through the Ministry of Migration were not operating optimally as people are not receiving the automated certificates confirming receipt of their emails or email responses. Refugees are facing issues with their application for residence cards and travel documents, as they are being asked to prove their address and many cannot do so. Their name is not on the lease or the bills of the accommodation where they stay, or they cannot get a statutory declaration from the lease holder.

Furthermore, there are problems with **transitioning the PAYPAA**, the temporary social services number on the applicant card, **to AMKA**, which is the unique and permanent social service number.

To learn more of the challenges faced by asylum seekers in Greece, on June 23, 2024, Refugees Support Aegean and ProAsyl published a Report on the 'Refugee Camps in Mainland Greece' which is available [here](#).

Extract: Refugee Support Aegean (RSA) presents its new report on the living conditions in the refugee camps of the mainland, CCACs or "Camps are currently the only form of reception offered to asylum seekers in Greece, underpinned by inadequate reception conditions in sites isolated from urban centres and with difficult access thereto. It also presents serious issues regarding the protection of asylum seekers' physical and mental health, compounded by severe staffing shortages, failure to disburse financial allowances to the majority of applicants and the absence of appropriate measures to assist the integration of beneficiaries of international protection into the broader society."

To learn more about [Detention and Reception Conditions Facts and figures](#) published by RSA on 20 May 2024.

Refugees arbitrarily deprived of their liberty despite unfeasible deportations.

Also in June 2024, several main stream media published reports drawing attention to "the horrors of 'pushbacks', short-hard term for forcing people to return to Turkey by diverse unsafe or violent means", a practice that has been in place for at least two years.

(BBC) Greek coastguard threw migrants overboard to their deaths, witnesses say - The United Nations' refugee and migration agencies on Friday [14 June] criticized Greece's failure over the past year to shed light on one of the worst migrant shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea that left hundreds dead.

([Guardian](#)) Greek coastguard's treatment of migrants 'clearly illegal', says ex-officer - A former Greek coastguard officer has described as "clearly illegal" the actions of colleagues who abandoned nine migrants at sea in one of 15 alleged pushbacks from Greek islands or territorial waters that reportedly killed dozens of people.

([BBC](#)) Greek opposition urges investigation after BBC migrant deaths report - Greece's main opposition party is demanding an investigation after a BBC report which found the coastguard had caused dozens of migrant deaths over three years, according to witnesses.

GREECE ([AP](#)) UN agencies urge Greece to shed light on migrant shipwreck that killed hundreds one year ago - The United Nations' refugee and migration agencies on Friday [14 June] criticised Greece's failure over the past year to shed light on one of the worst migrant shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea that left hundreds dead.

([Reuters](#)) Protesters rally for justice a year after Greece migrant boat disaster - Hundreds of demonstrators rallied in Athens on Friday [14 June] to mark the one-year anniversary of a shipwreck that killed hundreds of migrants off Greece, demanding answers about the causes of the disaster and the fate of relatives.

(Source: ECRE AIDA News Bulletin).

OUR CHALLENGES IN SERVICE DELIVERY

Operational impediments for all essential services: The challenges as described above and in the referenced reports render the delivery of all essential services, not least of which information and legal services, to asylum seekers and refugees.

Financial Setback: Many small NGOs delivering basic essential support services to asylum services are reducing services and some have closed or are soon to close. Fund raising for these services has become increasingly difficult as humanitarian crises proliferate in wars, famine and political unrest.

Limited funds prevented the retention of the services of A.Ss.I.S.T. Greek lawyers beyond 31 March 2024. With some success in raising funds in April 2024, A.Ss.I.S.T. began the recruitment process for Greek lawyer as our Legal Officer. In early May 2024, an Athens-based lawyer joined the Team to support and to sustain some of our legal services.

ADAPTING TO CHALLENGES

01 April to 30 June 2024 | 01 April to 30 June 2024

During this period, A.Ss.I.S.T.'s volunteers diligently handled all inquiries received through our helplines. Our team effectively identified clients in need of appeals or support during critical interviews, referred clients to various agencies for legal, medical, food, and accommodation assistance, and provided information on procedural matters, including Ministry of Migration online services, ID and travel document renewals, and other related issues.

In early May 2024, we welcomed a new Athens-based Greek lawyer to our team on a part-time basis to assist clients with legal matters requiring a Greek-registered lawyer. By the end of May 2024, our effective and efficient Client Service Manager (CSM) completed her term and departed.

By mid-June 2024, one of our Athens-based interpreters stepped up to take on the CSM role. He quickly adapted to the new responsibilities and is performing exceptionally well.

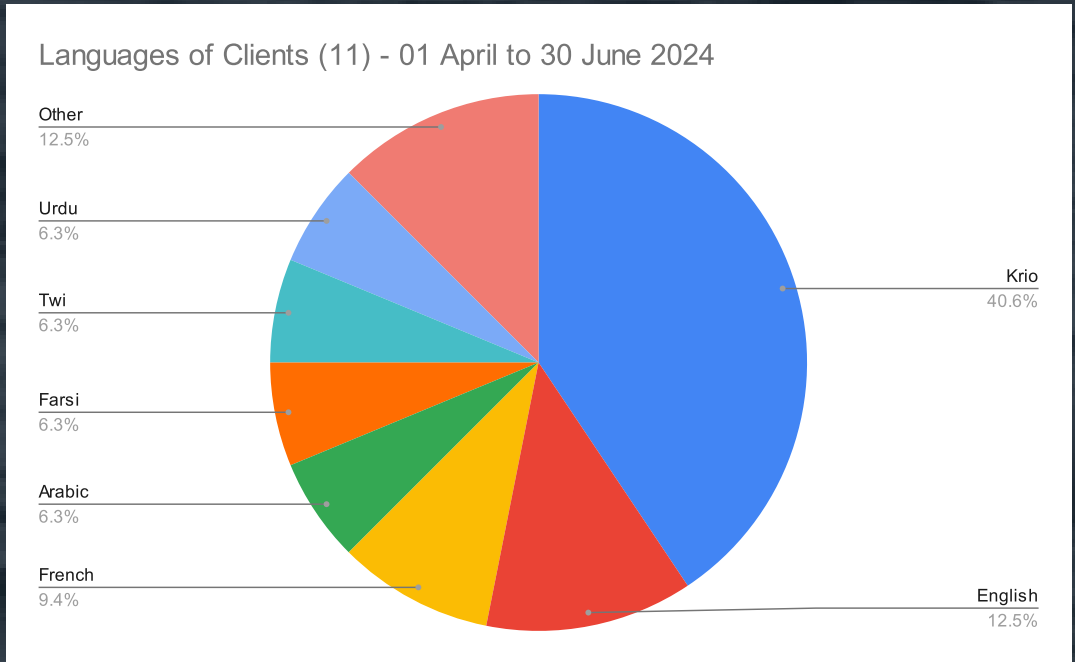
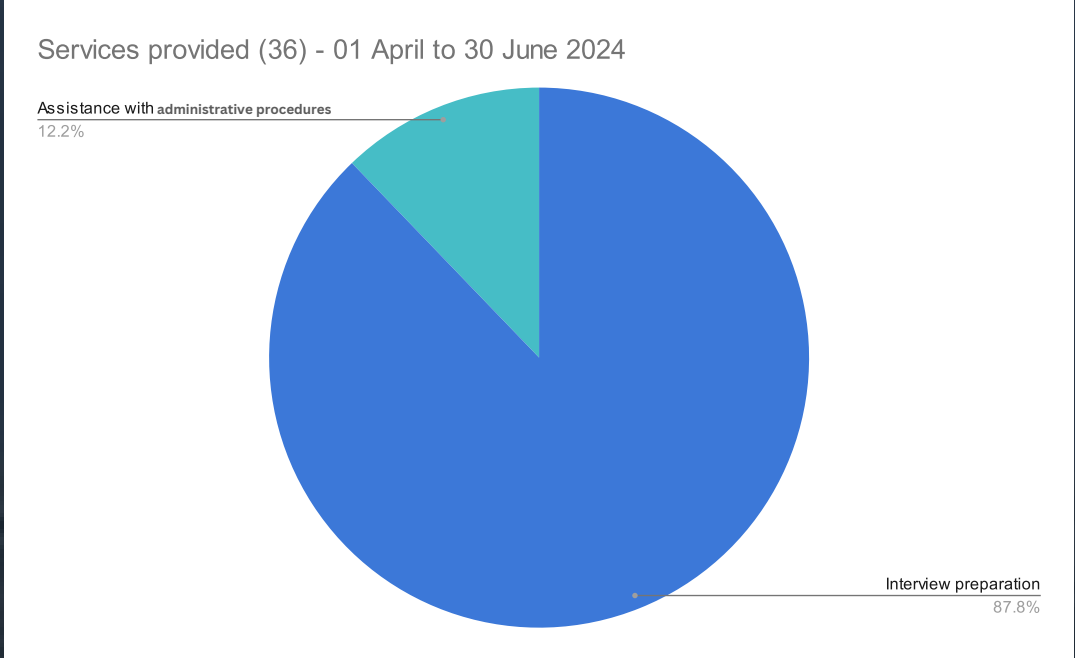
Throughout this reporting period, our Volunteer Legal Advisors (VLAs) and responsive on-call interpreters/translators—recruited from the asylum seeker/refugee communities—continued to provide vital services. This included information provision via our helpline and interview preparation sessions, offering interpretation in nine languages in addition to Greek and English. These services are invaluable to our clients as affirmed in feedback from our clients.

Due to reduced hours from Greek lawyers during this period, we were unable to serve as many clients as in previous quarters and as we would have liked. Both new team members will remain with A.Ss.I.S.T. until September 2024. Our team remains committed to maintaining the quality of services for every client.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

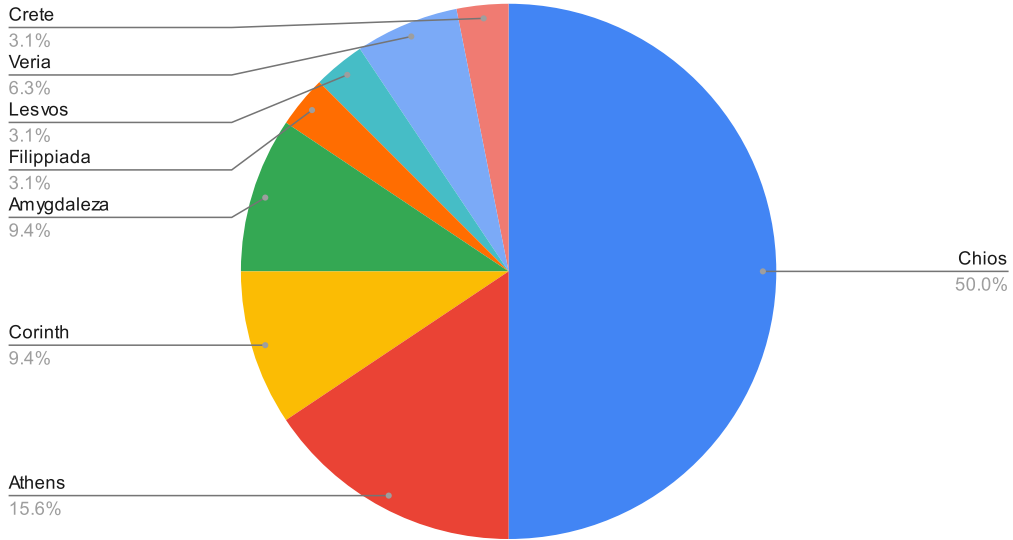
Service Continuity: From April to June 2024, our committed team offered free legal aid to over 30 individuals in 9 locations across Greece, requiring interpreters fluent in 9 languages other than English and Greek. We actively supported several clients in detention with their asylum claims, provided essential information for self-referrals as well as direct referrals to others services.

The results of A.Ss.I.S.T.'s work can be life changing so our commitment to serve will continue for as long as we have resources to do so.

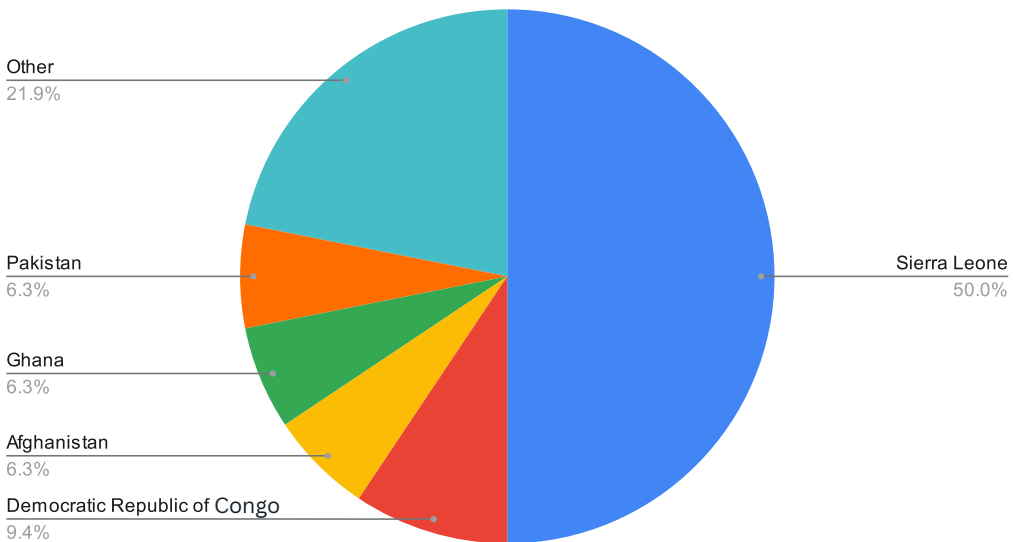


Other includes: Luganda (1); Amharic (1); Lingala (1); Greek (1).

Location of Clients (8) - 01 April to 30 June 2024.

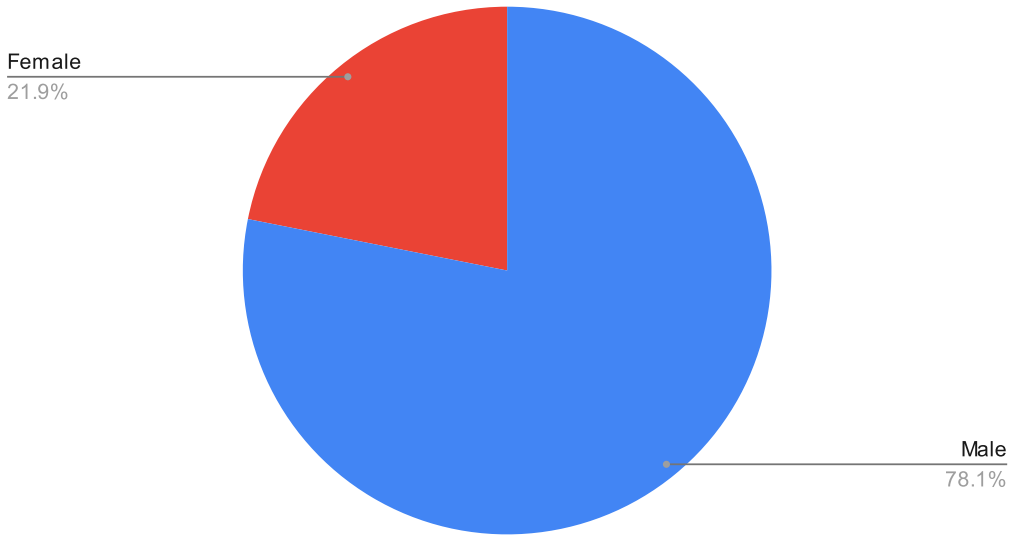


Nationalities (12) - 01 April to 30 June 2024



Other includes: Nigeria (1); Iraq (1); Egypt (1); Benin (1); Palestine (1); Uganda (1); Eritrea (1).

Gender of Clients - 01 April to 30 June 2024



IMPACT REPORT

Despite significant challenges, A.Ss.I.S.T. has continued to provide some crucial assistance to those seeking support through our helplines.

THE PROVISION OF FREE ACCURATE INFORMATION AND LEGAL AID CONTRIBUTES TO THE SMOOTHER RUNNING OF THE ASYLUM APPLICATION PROCEDURE, HELPS TO ENSURE THAT THE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THEIR SITUATIONS ARE CONSIDERED AND THAT THE RIGHTS OF THE PERSON SEEKING ASYLUM ARE RESPECTED.

A.Ss.I.S.T.'s services can contribute to substantial positive changes in the lives of asylum seekers and refugees in Greece, notably in four key areas:

- 1. Continued Access to Information Services and Legal Aid:** Our efforts to sustain services have resulted in continued engagement with asylum seeker and refugee communities, ensuring that as many individuals as our resources permitted received free information and legal assistance, services otherwise difficult to access.
- 2. Facilitating Informed Decision-Making:** By furnishing comprehensive information about their rights, legal procedures, and the asylum process, beneficiaries acquire a deeper understanding, permitting informed decision-making, enabling them to actively participate in their asylum cases. Equipped with knowledge, they can effectively advocate for their rights and navigate legal complexities with greater confidence. Feedback from beneficiaries confirms this impact.
- 3. Continuous Holistic Support:** A.Ss.I.S.T. emphasizes continuous, comprehensive legal aid. Beyond initial interviews or appeals, we extended our support throughout subsequent applications and other legal queries that may arise during the asylum process. This sustained assistance positively impacts beneficiaries' mental well-being by mitigating the stress associated with legal uncertainties and prolonged waiting periods.
- 4. Facilitated Access to Wider Support Services:** Beneficiaries' access to a broad spectrum of essential support services. These include healthcare, education, housing, and psychosocial support.

In summary, A.Ss.I.S.T.'s holistic approach not only can positively impact individual lives but also we can contribute significantly to fostering fairer and more equitable processes for asylum seekers and refugees in Greece.

CLIENT FEEDBACK

QUALITY IN A SERVICE IS NOT WHAT YOU PUT INTO IT. IT IS WHAT THE CLIENT GETS OUT OF IT. Peter F. Drucker*

The most valuable feedback continues to be received verbally through direct contact with clients, in WhatsApp messages and via our client feedback form. Our client feedback form is forwarded to clients in six languages is available [here](#).

CLIENT FEEDBACK AT A GLANCE.

(14/05/2024): Tell her I appreciated her efforts and love she showed me (talking about the lawyer)

(16/5/24): I've already finished Lawyer! I would like to sincerely thank you for your availability and help towards me. Excellent day.

(05/04/2024): I finished with my interview and I want to say a big thank you to you and your organization for the helping hands, it was very helpful. A Big thank you!

(11/04/2024): I wanted to say thank you very much for your help! I learn a lot yesterday I hope my fiance also will thank you once again

Information sharing between team members also contributes to our understanding of those we serve, our efforts to improve services, to assure accuracy of information content and to pass on to others their realities, legal, medical, economic and social.

*PETER FERDINAND DRUCKER :AN AUSTRIAN AMERICAN MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT, EDUCATOR, AND AUTHOR, WHOSE WRITINGS CONTRIBUTED TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND PRACTICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN MANAGEMENT THEORY.

CURRENT ACTION AND PLANS

Our commitment to providing services to asylum seekers remains unwavering. Financial limitations highlight the need for securing more grants and innovative solutions to sustain our services.

Ms. Molly Pugh-Jones, volunteered with us in Greece in 2023 as Operations Manager, now based in London, continues to support our work in social media and fund-raising.

All Team members continue to be extremely supportive of our services during difficult times: all are professional and caring in the delivery of our services.

Our fund-raising volunteers will work hard in their endeavour to raise further funds with a view to expanding our legal services to better meet the demand without sacrificing quality of service.

A.Ss.I.S.T. Partners, our governance board, will continue to adapt to challenges and adjust to change, to tailor our cloth to our resources as we must! A plan to 're-invent' A.Ss.I.S.T. has already been developed and implementation of this plan is proposed for the next Quarter 2024.

Our efforts to improve information dissemination are ongoing. We continue to examine ways to maintain the currency and accuracy of all information: legal and practical information related to services available.

We continue too our efforts to improve our record keeping. Anticipated benefits include:

- quicker access to accurate asylum laws and procedures, reducing response time while ensuring accuracy;

- improved efficiency and service, saving time in information gathering for better support to asylum seekers, improving customer service with volunteers trained to respond to enquiries related to access to the Asylum Service and other practices in place that are not easily navigated by everyone; and
- fostering continuous learning for all team members. It is anticipated that the results of current on our operations will be announced in October 2024.

Information sharing between team members also contributes to our understanding of those we serve, our efforts to improve services, to assure accuracy of information content and to pass on to others their realities, legal, medical, economic and social.

The support of like-minded people is urgently needed to maintain our services. Donate, volunteer or share information about our services to others who may be interested in our work.

If you wish to volunteer, please express your interest via email to recruitment@assistchios.info

If you wish to donate, please go to our website [here](#). or go to Global Giving: ORG #84198 [here](#).

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO READ THIS REPORT.

Sheila (Sandy) Cross
Legal Representative & Administrative Partner