

LEGAL INTERVENTION PROJECT IN LESVOS

Reporting Period:
October - December 2022



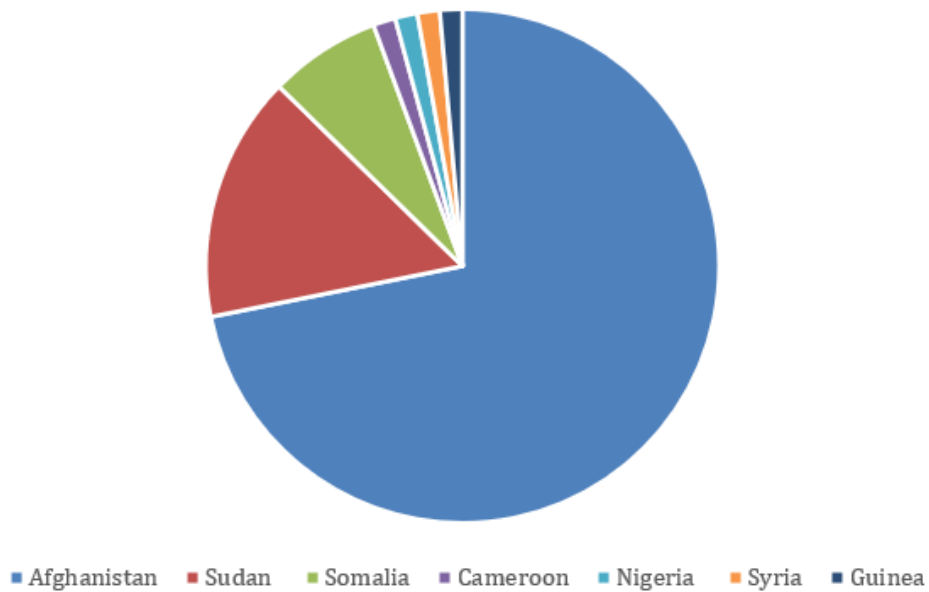
OUR BENEFICIARIES

- LESVOS -

Over the months of October, November, and December 2022, the Defence for Children International Greece (DCI Greece) team in cooperation and with the financial support of Doro Blancke's Organization: *Flüchtlingshilfe Doro Blancke*, legally supported **70 individuals**, among which:

- Families
- Single mothers
- Women survivors of trafficking and/or FGM
- Young adults
- Unaccompanied Minors

Countries of Origin:



OUR WORK IN NUMBERS

- LESVOS -

76 Risk Assessments

were conducted aiming to detect any risk factor, need and vulnerability of every individual coming in contact with our team

70 beneficiaries

have been legally represented during their asylum interviews (admissibility and eligibility)

74 tailored legal memos

were submitted before the asylum authorities in order to support our beneficiaries' asylum claims both in the 1st and 2nd degree

13 Camp residents

were benefited from the "drop-in" sessions, where they had the chance to be informed about their rights, the asylum legal procedures and any durable legal option available to them depending on their cases

19 Community Volunteers

received proper information about the asylum procedures but also legal guidance and advice on the cases they were handling

34 of our beneficiaries

alongside with the legal support, were granted access to social services through our referral pathway. Amongst them:

7 children

were referred to MVI clinic, for targeted pediatric psychological support

17 beneficiaries

including single mothers, young adults and parents were referred to specialized **psychologists** so as to receive proper psychological support

6 women

were referred to the camp clinic and MSF for **gynecological support**

1 family

was referred to the camp clinic with an impelling note for a need for **specific treatments** due to an infectious disease

Photo from one of the legal info sessions where 8 young adults who just arrived on the island, were informed about the asylum procedures and their rights and had the opportunity to share their questions.

November 2022



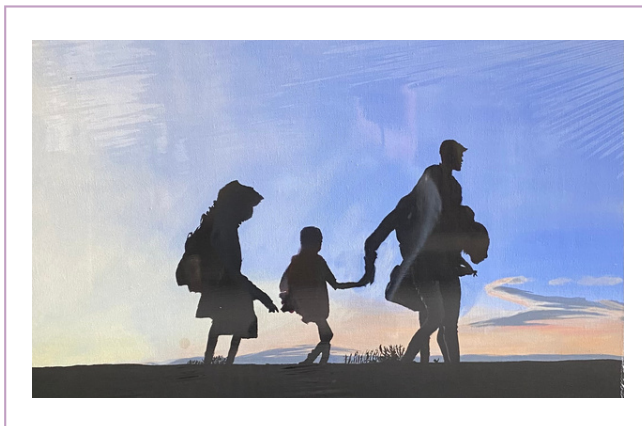
OUR INTERVENTION

- LESVOS -

WHAT WE DO WHEN WE LEGALLY INTERVENE:

- Contact/Initial meeting to assess and identify possible risks and vulnerability
- Legal support and representation
- Draft of personalized memorandum to support the asylum claims before the 1st and 2nd degree, both for Admissibility and Asylum Eligibility procedures
- Support with subsequent claims
- Presentation of legal information to the beneficiaries about their rights, and asylum procedures
- Extensive follow-up case management
- Informative sessions for asylum seekers (camp residents and non, Parea community volunteers, etc)
- Effective/Strong cooperation network among the actors in the field to support efficient referral pathways
- Capacity Building through training to front-line humanitarian professionals

OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - LESVOS -



Afghan Family of 8

“I left my country for safety reasons, but also because, due to the situation, I would have not been able to enroll my daughters in school. I want to guarantee them an education and safety, and build a safe future for my family with dignity”

During the Taliban resurgence of 2020, S.M., a father of 6 who worked for the National Intelligence in Kabul, and cooperated with the Americans, was targeted by the terrorist group and received multiple life threats. For this reason, a few months later, S.M. decided to leave the country to safeguard his own family.

Following multiple difficulties in escaping, the family with 6 children between the ages of 1 and 12 left Afghanistan, traveled through Iran, and entered Greece via Turkey.

The journey was long and dangerous. On the border between Iran and Turkey, both Iranian and Turkish authorities mistreated them, without any exclusion for women and children.

Once in Turkey, they applied for legal documents to reside in the country but were rejected without the possibility to explain their story. S.M. was arrested for not having a residence permit, and was transferred in a camp for several months, leaving his wife with 6 children alone and with no place to stay. Following multiple efforts from his wife F, the Turkish authorities released the husband with a deportation intimation.

In Greece, our legal team met the family the day before their Admissibility Interview due to the short notice for the procedures in Lesbos. We explained to them their rights and obligations, but also the purpose of the interview. Moreover, our team ran a vulnerability assessment on the whole family and highlighted the possibility of PTSD for the children who witnessed police brutality on the borders from Iran to Turkey, and referred the family to the pediatric psychologists of MVI for a consultation.

The family was legally represented during their Admissibility interview, and through the memorandum drafted by our team to support the information provided.

A few weeks later, a positive decision was received. The family was able to proceed with their asylum interview, and explain the reasons why they left their country and why they fear going back. At the moment, the family is waiting for the Asylum Office to examine the information provided during their Eligibility interview about Afghanistan while receiving constant support from our team.

OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - LESVOS -



Young adult from Syria

"I miss my country and my parents, but I refuse to risk my life to fight for a country that is not mine and to kill people."

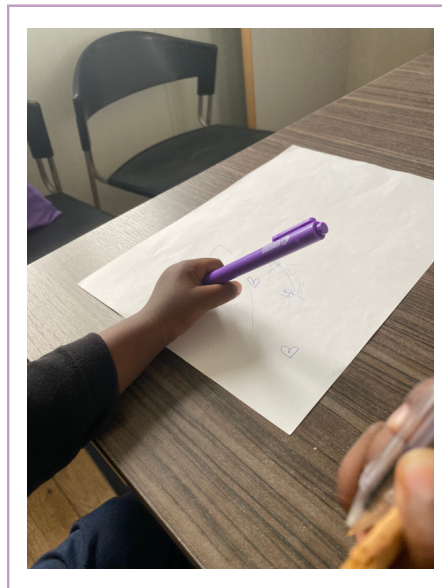
Conflicts never end in themselves, they are connected in many ways.

A. was 16 years old, still leaving with his parents in Syria, when Russian authorities started recruiting young Syrians so as to participate in the Ukrainian conflict and fight on the side of Russia. Not wanting to participate in such hostilities, in September 2022, A. left Syria with the help of his family and reached Greece alone. Upon his arrival, he declared to have an older brother currently living in Greece.

In the context of our legal intervention, our team ran all the initial steps, such as the Risks and Needs Assessment, the simulation of the asylum interview, and initiated the legal procedure in order for the brother to obtain custody of A., still underage.

After a careful examination of the reasons the young adult left his country of origin, and the legal documents and reports our legal team submitted to support the information provided by A., the Asylum Office granted him with International Protection.

OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - LESVOS -



Single mother from Somalia, victim of FGM and forced marriage

“I have recurring nightmares where my husband's family finds me and takes away my child from me. I was considered no one for many years, but here in Greece I am finding my voice”

When she was only 16 years old, O. was forced by her paternal uncle to marry an older man in their village in Somalia. The man and his family were violent and very abusive and forced her to undergo the practice of FGM four times, after every time she gave birth to one of her children. Right after the delivery, the husband's family always took her newborn away from her, keeping her from raising her children.

After getting pregnant for the fifth time, she decided to leave her country to put an end to the constant physical and mental abuse and to be able to guarantee a better future for herself and her soon-to-be-born child.

In Turkey, she was homeless, and a victim of aggression. When she approached the hospital to ask for help, the authorities sent her away on the ground that she didn't have the documentation to legally reside in Turkey, and her pregnancy was a subterfuge to receive the resident permit.

Upon her arrival in Lesbos, and the completion of the quarantine, our legal team started being by her side, informing her about her rights as an asylum seeker but also as a survivor of Female Genital Mutilation. It was critical for her to receive due legal assistance with her pending admissibility interview, since she had to explain in depth why Turkey is a very dangerous place for her. Alongside the legal support, she received extensive case management in order to have access to a specialized gynecologist in FGM and a competent psychologist.

Through our legal intervention, we managed to secure a positive asylum admissibility result for O., who, in the meantime, gave birth in Mytilene's hospital, and protect her and her child from deportation to Turkey. Moreover, O. was selected by the camp authorities for the ongoing transfers to the Mainland. She is now in a facility on the Mainland, waiting to undergo her eligibility interview, while DCI-Greece keeps supporting her case.

OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - LESVOS -



Single woman from Sudan

“My family didn't have a lot of money. They managed to enroll me in school. One day, on my way back home, I was kidnapped and raped. I had to stop my education because of fear”

S.B. lived in Darfur, Sudan with her family. One day, after school she was kidnapped and raped by multiple men from a violent rebel armed group and left walking back home bleeding and with her clothes ragged. When her family tried to report the event to the authorities, they started being targeted by the perpetrators and told they could not help it because the men's clan is the majority and very powerful. Furthermore, during the several attempts to report it, the older brother of S.B. was captured and tortured for 7 days, and her father lost his life during a fire.

Having suffered such violence, and having lost part of her family. S.B. was visibly in distress while explaining her story to our team. We made sure to create a safe environment for her to feel comfortable, and gave her the time she needed to share her past. Our team walked S.B. throughout all the asylum procedures, explaining her rights and what to expect once in the asylum interview and after. In this case, as for many others, we felt the importance to be physically present during her interview, to help her feel at ease with a familiar presence, and to legally represent her in such an important step.

Moreover, after evaluating the vulnerability of S.B., we referred her to a competent psychologist.

With S.B. strength in explaining all her journey and the reasons why she decided to leave her country, and the constant support from our team along the different procedures, S.B. was granted International Protection and is now planning to restart her education and build herself a safe future.

OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - LESVOS -



Single young adult from Nigeria - Info Session

“The asylum system confuses people like me without an education with all the different procedures and information. I did not have the chance to be informed in detail about all these”

M. reached out to our team during a “drop-in” info session in Doro Blancke’s space in Parea Community. He has two rejections and he was in despair about the next steps he had to follow. DCI-Greece team extensively explained him the following steps, analyzing with him the reasons for the previous rejects but also helped him to register himself in the online platform created for subsequent applications.

As M., many community volunteers, camp residents, and professionals identify Doro Blancke’s space as a focal point where they can clarify their doubts, ask questions, and be supported for technical steps by our legal team, willing to help them navigate the asylum system.

OUR WORK IN NUMBERS

- ATHENS -

In total 71 individuals, amongst them:

21 beneficiaries

were legally represented during their asylum interviews

21 tailored legal memos

were submitted before the asylum authorities

9 unaccompanied minors

received legal support with their family reunification applications

5 single mothers

that have suffered torture in their country of origin or during their trip to Greece, were granted access to protection services, so as to receive proof of documentation of torture. In the meantime, our team is working, in order for them to be legally recognized as victims of trafficking.

4 single mothers

received support with their subsequent applications. For all of them, their case was reopened and the procedure started from the beginning

9 of our beneficiaries

representing homeless and exploited single mothers and unaccompanied minors in danger were transferred to safe accommodation

32 asylum seekers

have been informed about their rights, the asylum procedures, and durable legal options through the information sessions delivered to the refugee communities

Countries of Origin:

Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Bangladesh, Egypt, Sierra Leone

OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - ATHENS -

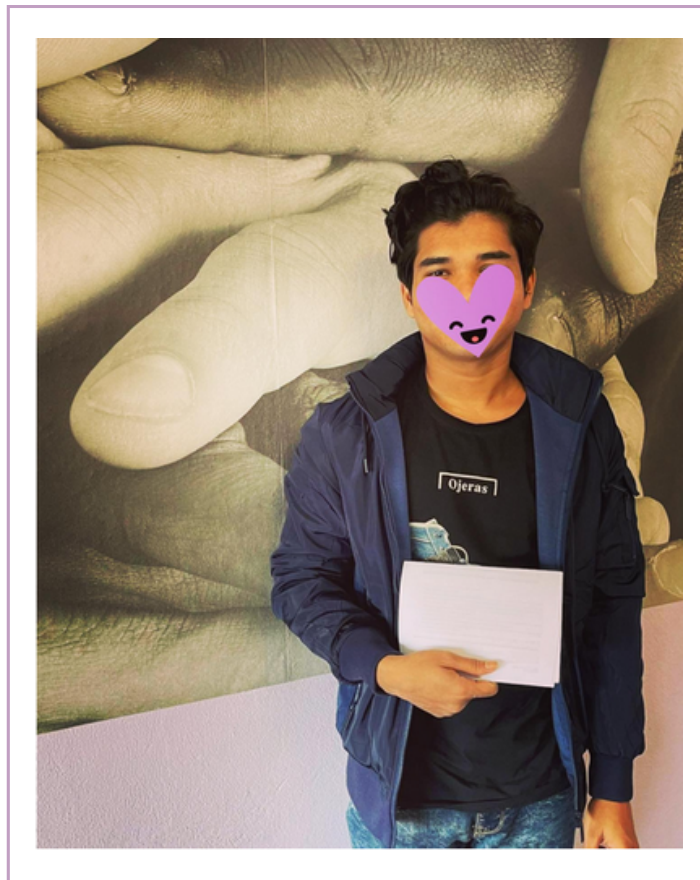


'I think I will finally be able to sleep tonight. My girls are safe.'

M. is a mother of 2 from Sierra Leone. She left her country of origin to save her two girls from undergoing the Female Genital Mutilation Procedure she had to suffer. She wished them to grow up free and be able to make their own choices in life. She was not even aware of what the asylum procedure stood for. Her asylum claim was rejected.

When she reached our offices, and after conducting a 'needs and risk assessment', we started drafting a holistic plan, to support her and her young girls. We guaranteed their access to basic rights that they were deprived of, due to the rejection of the asylum claim, while giving them the opportunity to take part in healing activities and receive psychological support. Day by day, they got more empowered. At the same time, we started working on reopening her asylum case by gathering all the missing evidence and applying for a subsequent asylum claim. Successfully, in due time she was invited by the asylum authority to undergo an asylum interview again. Finally, a positive answer was received after a month and her sleepless nights are now over.

OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - ATHENS -



'Today, I woke up smiling, for the first time in months. Thank you. Can't wait to see familiar faces again!'

M. is a 17-year-old boy from Bangladesh, whose brother is living legally in Italy. However, M. was not even aware that the family reunification procedure even exists. He received all his information from smugglers that wished to exploit him, by making him believe illegal ways to leave Greece were his only option.

We immediately started case management, in order to provide him with the most appropriate support. Family reunification cases are not always smooth and without obstacles. In this case, we received several rejections, which made us doubt any positive final result. At the same time, the boy's psychological state was worsening day by day. In such cases, persistence and constant follow-ups are key to bring positive change. Legal report after legal report, we managed to turn around the negative decision and be accepted by Italy to be reunited with his brother.! His air tickets were handed over to him and right now he is rebuilding his life on safer grounds.

OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - ATHENS -



'We left our country because our lives were in danger and because we wanted to be safe. But here in Greece for so long, we could not apply for asylum and my children had to live on the streets for so many nights.'

A. family, originally from Congo, arrived in August 2022 through the Evros borders and finally reached Athens, a few weeks later. The family consists of the parents and three young children, one of them facing severe health issues. They were under the impression that things would be easier in the capital of Greece, but the reality was much different. They remained unregistered, unable to access their basic rights, such as healthcare and education for the children. The family had to live rough on the streets for 2 months facing countless dangers.

Through the newly set up official online platform, they applied for registration, receiving an appointment to complete their asylum registration a year later, something that lead them to despair.

Once they reached our Helpdesk for support in October 2022, we immediately put into action an emergency plan involving all the competent authorities, highlighting the vulnerability of the family and the child's health issues. After intense legal actions, the family received an earlier appointment for registration. They have successfully applied for asylum and have received their asylum cards.

However, there was another great obstacle to overcome, homelessness. Since the 'Estia programme is now closing down, thus not being possible to provide safe accommodation more and more families cannot access a decent shelter. They spent some days in Malakasa camp, when we finally, after contacting and coordinating all competent authorities, managed to transfer them to a safe shelter provided by an NGO. We remain by their side, to support them legally in their asylum case, as well as to ensure they never face homelessness and deprivation of their rights again.

WHAT ARE THE LEGAL NEEDS ON THE GROUND?

CURRENT CONTEXT: LESVOS

Our Legal project implementation on the island of Lesbos has provided already efficient and vital legal support and representation to asylum applicants.

At the moment, the vast majority of active NGOs in Lesbos are challenged by a plethora of issues, leading to a hindered ability to provide their services. An increased lack of available interpreters but also lawyers, while at the same time operating under stricter rules, has led to a continuously increased number of people who cannot have access to even basic legal support in the asylum application stages.

In relation to Unaccompanied Minors, it is now almost virtually impossible to transfer them to the mainland due to a severe lack of accommodation options. The Asylum authorities deemed it necessary in this context to restart all of the asylum interviews again and to proceed with the family reunification claims of the children at the local asylum office of Lesbos, which in itself leads to an increased need for legal aid services for all the applicants, a legal aid which is not provided by the state. Without efficient legal support, children's fair access to the asylum procedures will be undermined, while those children wishing to apply family reunification cases will face the risk of missing the three month deadline to lodge their family reunification applications, as set out in Dublin Regulation III.

The above-mentioned showcase the vital need to further supplement the legal assistance program in Lesbos, in order to support asylum seekers throughout all the stages of the procedure. Through our consistent and lengthy presence on the island offering legal support, we are one of the few legal actors who have gained the trust and smooth cooperation with the competent stakeholders responsible for giving access to the asylum seekers.

In this regard, we emphasize the importance of further strengthening the legal assistance on Lesbos, in order to support asylum-seekers throughout their asylum claim properly. It is imperative for us to reach and continue supporting asylum applicants currently living in Kara Tepe and Mavrovouni camp, ensuring our beneficiaries have fair access to all the asylum procedures and due legal representation while enhancing the cooperation network with the field actors so as to guarantee the implementation of our holistic approach for each and every individual.



WHAT ARE THE LEGAL NEEDS ON THE GROUND?

CURRENT CONTEXT: ATHENS

The number of arrivals through the mainland has followed an increasing trajectory. At the same time, those of them entering Greece through the Evros border are facing great delays and obstacles while trying to register their asylum claims.

In September of 2022, an online pre-registration platform for asylum applications was launched for people who wanted to apply for asylum. Through this online platform asylum seekers can pre-register themselves while at the same time, they can also book appointments with the asylum office in order to complete their asylum registration. This can be in itself a positive tool but not in its current state. At the time of this report, the online platform is not suitable for the majority of the individuals who may want to use it, since a large majority of languages are omitted thus rendering it totally futile for applicants of many countries and origins.

Regarding the appointments themselves, individuals have to proceed to the new camps in Malakasa and Diavata in Southern and Northern Greece respectively. These camps are a long distance from the urban centers where the vast majority of the asylum seekers live, thus rendering them difficult to reach. The camps themselves since their beginnings have been severely understaffed and under-resourced, which especially applies to the Mobile Units of Reception and Identification Service (RIS). At the same time all the above-mentioned lack in totality vital medical and psycho-social personnel required for first reception procedures.

This situation has left hundreds of people unregistered and without proper accommodation. Lack of registration equals lack of visibility, which in turn can place people on the move at higher risk of being arrested by the police and kept in detention. This has certainly been the case since more and more people have faced these issues.

In the meantime, the ESTIA housing scheme for asylum seekers is scheduled to be shut down. Hundreds of vulnerable asylum seekers are being evicted from these shelters and are forced to move to the aforementioned isolated camps. It should be noted that for these people and their families, who were living in apartments and their children regularly attended school, going back to refugee camps directly translated into a massive change in their lives. Not only they are disrupted but moreover, their children's education is halted and their steps toward integration are virtually stopped. This development further deteriorates their mental well-being and stress levels while cultivating a rooted uncertainty in their children. The fact that the number of people accommodated through the program was high, has left hundreds of them with no real solution. Consequently, the number of homeless individuals and families in dire need in the Athens area has begun to dramatically increase again.

Through our holistic socio - legal intervention in Athens, we aim to be by the side of the most vulnerable asylum seekers from the very initial stage of their asylum journey. Our efforts wish to offer them place of safety and support, while in the meantime we fight to bring them out of homelessness, despair, invisibility and risk of exploitation by bringing them in a context of 'legality' and visibility under the radar of the official authorities.



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