

Reporting period

NOVEMBER 2023 -
JANUARY 2024





Since its inception, Defence for Children International - Greece has remained committed to aiding the most vulnerable, with a specific emphasis on those on the move. Our organization's core mission is to deliver comprehensive and ongoing assistance to the increasing number of asylum seekers traversing the EU borders, both via the Aegean islands and Athens.

Over the last two years, our legal program on Lesbos has evolved into a vital resource hub, offering legal support and representation throughout the asylum procedures to asylum seekers while providing also legal information to asylum seekers, recognized refugees, and community volunteers regarding their claims and the asylum system.

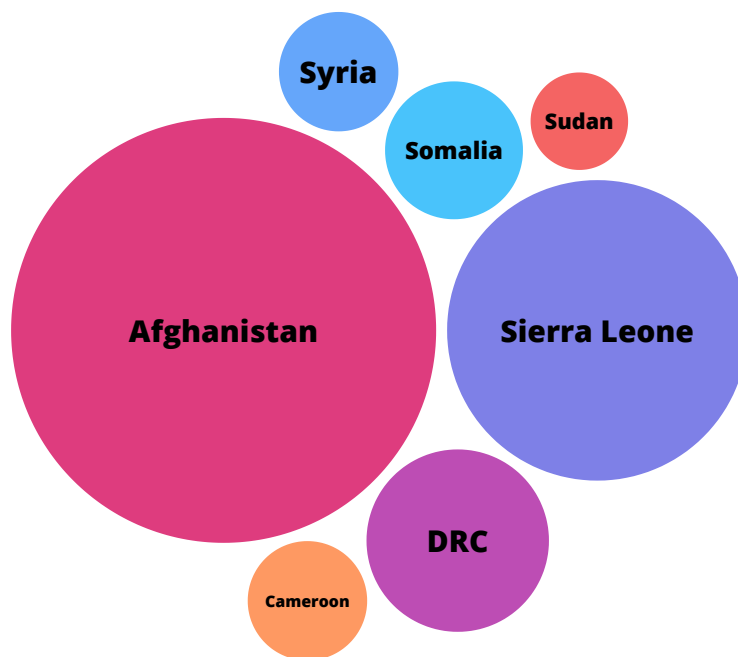
The success of this legal initiative is attributed to a collaborative effort, thanks to the support and partnership of Doro Blancke and Flüchtlingshilfe Doro Blancke.

Over the past two years, we supported:

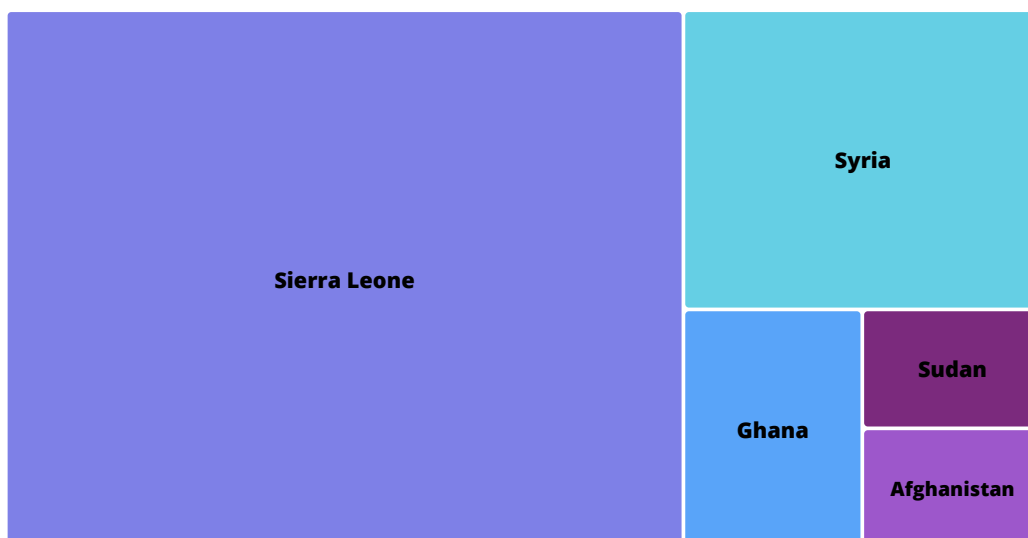
- **FAMILIES**
nuclear and single-headed families
- **SINGLE MOTHERS SURVIVORS OF TRAFFICKING/FGM/TORTURE**
with underage children
- **VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS**
Survivors of Human Trafficking, torture, and/or FGM
- **UNACCOMPANIED MINORS**
- **YOUTH TRANSITIONING TO ADULthood**
- **YOUNG ADULTS**

In this period of time, in Lesvos, DCI-Greece supported:

109 beneficiaries for their Asylum Application



24 individuals through targeted legal info sessions and drop ins for informations and guidance through the asylum procedure



Our Intervention

Lesvos

109 BENEFICIARIES

were supported by DCI-Greece for the Asylum Procedures

for whom we conducted

NEEDS AND RISK ASSESSMENTS

aiming to detect any risk factor, need, and vulnerability of every individual

109 ASYLUM SEEKERS

were supported with tailored plans based on the specific legal needs of each individual

for whom we drafted

TAILORED LEGAL MEMOS

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

In addition

27 SINGLE MOTHERS, YOUNG ADULTS, AND PARENTS

were also granted access to social services through our referral pathway

namely, referrals were made to:

SPECIALIZED PSYCHOLOGISTS

so as for our beneficiaries to receive proper psychological support

OTHER SPECIALIZED SERVICES

so as for the certification's assessment to be conducted, especially on cases related to torture, human trafficking, FGM, and gender-based violence

What are the legal needs on the ground?

Current Context: Lesvos

ARRIVALS IN NOVEMBER

1,267

ARRIVALS IN DECEMBER

1,532

ARRIVALS IN JANUARY

NOT
PUBLISHED
YET

The winter months were characterized by a significant number of camp residents in Kara Tepe and Mavrovouni, reaching over 5,500 people, and by a significant number of challenges in providing adequate support. The activity of the NGOs in the field has been particularly challenged by the ongoing lack of interpretation, the structural changes within EUAA and the asylum office in Lesvos, the significant influx of asylum-seekers, the insufficient legal aid and the inhumane living conditions.

Because of the drop of temperatures and the camp's infrastructure inadequacies, winter months have exposed people extremely difficult living conditions. With temperatures reaching 0°, more than 4,000 people have spent the winter months without heating, and when water was provided, it was cold.

Despite these challenges, DCI-Greece legal intervention on Lesvos island, with the support of Doro Blancke's Organization, has been adapted to continue to provide, on a daily basis, efficient and vital support, and legal representation to asylum applicants.

Because of the insufficient legal aid provided both in the mainland and the islands, due to funding shortage to NGOs, there is a trend of turning legal asylum support into massive legal info sessions.

We have been working to fill this gap, and we managed to create an additional referral pathway amongst the civil society organizations and maintain our priority which is the provision of individual legal support encompassed by the draft of tailored legal memos.

Moreover, since legal aid is very limited both in the mainland and in the islands, and people keep on being transferred to the mainland from the border islands, we have witnessed an increase in the number of self-referred cases to our Helpdesk from the camps across the country. We adapted our service to respond to this need, and have increased to support people with their asylum interviews preparation remotely.

Our online helpdesk component breaks the barrier of distance and physical presence, facilitating seamless interaction across the country. Simultaneously, for the individuals we represent on Lesvos Island upon their transfer to the mainland, they continue to receive tailored legal support, and we persist in following their legal case.



Our legal intervention through real-life stories

Lesvos

"Since my little sister died because of FGM at the age of 9, I have been raising my voice so for this to never happen to anybody else. I became an activist for women's rights and I was targeted. They threatened to kill me. I had to leave the country, but I will never stop speaking, raising awareness and fighting for women's rights to choose for themselves."

- Young woman from Sierra Leone, 19 years old.

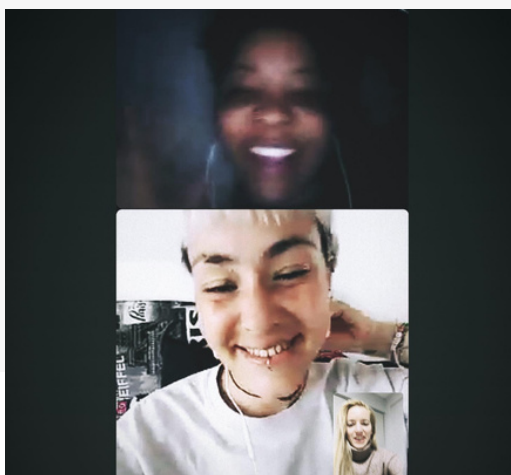
When she was 4 years old, she survived Female Genital Mutilations. In Sierra Leone, it is estimated that more than 83% of women and girls aged between 15 and 49 have undergone FGM. The consequences of this practice still affect her life as a woman today.

When she was 16 years old, her little sister died at the age of 9 years old after a complication caused by the Genital Mutilation. Abigail started to raise her voice and advocate to stop this practice, in order for this to never happen again to anybody else.

She became an activist for women's rights, speaking publicly in schools, radio stations and villages. Because of her activism about FGM, she was targeted and threatened to be killed if she didn't stop. She could not be silent, and she had to leave the country to save her life.

Only days after her arrival, Abigail, through our referral pathway, connected with us. Prioritizing her safety, we conducted a thorough risk assessment and devised a tailored plan. Our legal team organized several meetings with her to identify her needs, and provide guidance for the asylum procedure. Individualized preparation for her asylum interview followed, ensuring she felt informed and confident. Collaborating closely with medical organizations, we obtained official and updated medical documents, including the FGM documentation, to strengthen further her case.

Our team will stand firmly beside her supporting her building a sustainable life in Greece.



Our legal intervention through real-life stories

Lesvos

"We had to escape from Afghanistan because the Taliban took over our province and threatened us. When we arrived in Turkey, life was hell. Our children were sick and couldn't go to the hospital. They did not allow us to apply for asylum and receive a legal resident permit. They did not treat us like humans."

- Family of 4 from Afghanistan

In the wake of the Taliban's takeover of their province in Afghanistan, Younes and Fatima, aged 24 and 22, embarked on a perilous journey to Turkey with their 2-year-old daughter and newborn son. Threatened by the Taliban, their pursuit of safety encountered additional hardships in Turkey. Denied the right to apply for asylum and obtain a legal resident permit, their lives were marred by despair.

Per Greece's asylum regulations, Turkey is considered a safe third country for Afghans, Syrians, Somalis, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis. Individuals with these nationalities must undergo a first admissibility interview to justify that Turkey is not safe, or face deportation.

In Turkey, the family attempted to rebuild their lives, seeking asylum and legal resident permits, but faced consistent rejection. Without the resident permit, access to fundamental services like education and healthcare was barred. Their children fell ill, yet medical services remained inaccessible. Unemployment was unavoidable, as work was prohibited without the permit. Younes resorted to undeclared jobs, leading to his arrest and a month-long incarceration. Fearing for their safety and deportation back to Afghanistan, the family arrived in Greece.

DCI-Greece intervened, conducting a comprehensive risk assessment and prioritizing the family's needs, including specific healthcare for the children and psychosocial support for the parents. Our team facilitated essential connections, linking them with doctors while at the same time comprehensive preparation meetings were conducted for the admissibility interview and a legal memo was submitted before the asylum authorities.



Our legal intervention through real-life stories

Lesvos

"In Sierra Leone, I had a relationship with a woman. We were in love, but we had to keep our relationship secret because LGBT people have no rights in my country and they are targeted. One day, we were at her house, and one neighbor found out about us. He called the police, and while I could escape from the back door, she was arrested. One month later I found out that she committed suicide in prison."

- Young woman from Sierra Leone, 21 years old

When Hawa was 19, she fell in love with a woman, facing risks in Sierra Leone where same-sex relationships are criminalized. They kept their love a secret, pretending to be just friends. One day, the police was called, and a crowd gathered outside her girlfriend's house. Hawa managed to escape, but her girlfriend was caught, beaten, and later took her own life in prison.

Hawa made her way to Greece via Guinea and Turkey. When we met her at DCI-Greece, her mental health was critical, and she was scared to share her story. We created a safe space for her, met multiple times, while at the same time we connected her with a psychologist for ongoing support.

LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in Greece often face extra challenges, having to prove their orientation more than others. Our dedicated team stood by Hawa, representing her to asylum authorities with a detailed legal memo showing the dangers LGBTQ+ individuals face in Sierra Leone. Now, we're waiting for the asylum interview decision, staying in touch with Hawa and her psychologist, ready to help with any new needs.



What are the legal needs on the ground?

Current Context: Athens

The displaced population in Athens is a diverse mix, encompassing new arrivals, individuals with rejected asylum applications seeking case reopening, and those with positive asylum decisions. Notably, there has been a significant surge in arrivals across the country over the past months. However, the existing reception and asylum systems continue to fall short in adequately addressing the needs of these individuals.

Within the demographic of displaced people, there is also a significant number of individuals whose asylum claims have been rejected. This denial of protection is primarily due to the absence of legal support and victim identification mechanisms, leaving them in precarious conditions with limited access to essential services and support networks.

Over the summer, the population in mainland camps witnessed a notable rise, soaring from 8,500 to the current **17,000, as indicated by the latest UNHCR data**. This substantial increase underscores the urgent need for heightened legal and psychosocial support. Concurrently, a troubling trend has emerged, with a considerable number of mothers seeking assistance at our center encountering rejections. This has placed them in precarious circumstances, residing on the streets, and exposed to various dangers.

Our Center has experienced a rise in self-referred cases from camps nationwide. Given the limited availability of legal assistance throughout the country and the consistent transfer of individuals from border islands to the mainland, our presence on the island of Lesbos has played a pivotal role. Word of mouth among refugees has resulted in increased online requests for support with asylum interview preparation from individuals currently residing in different camps around the Attica region or those reaching out to us from various parts of the country.

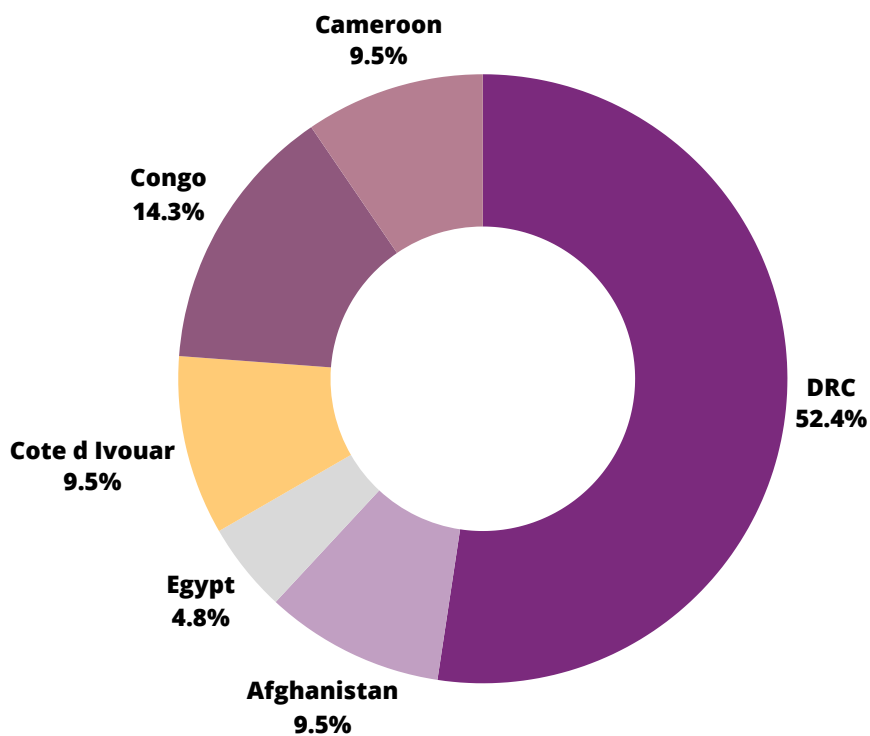
In response to these challenges, our team has been working diligently to meet the needs of the displaced population. For those located in the Attica region, face-to-face support is provided at our office, ensuring personalized assistance. For individuals in other parts of the country, we've strengthened our online channels, allowing us to extend support and guidance remotely. Our commitment remains unwavering, seeking to address the unique circumstances faced by each individual, whether in person or through virtual means



In this period of time, in Athens, DCI-Greece supported:

21 beneficiaries

- **6 SINGLE MOTHERS**
with their underage children were supported throughout the asylum procedures
- **2 UNACCOMPANIED MINORS**
- **6 YOUNG ADULTS UP TO 25 YEARS OLD**



Our Intervention

Athens

21 BENEFICIARIES

were supported by DCI-Greece for the Asylum Procedures

for whom we conducted

21 NEEDS AND RISK ASSESSMENTS

aiming to detect any risk factor, need, and vulnerability of every individual

21 ASYLUM SEEKERS

were supported with tailored plans based on the specific legal needs of each individual

for whom we drafted

TAILORED LEGAL MEMOS

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

In addition

2 INDIVIDUALS

received psychological support from our specialized psychologist (Narrative Exposure Therapy)

4 INDIVIDUALS

were referred to specialized services so as to be certified as survivors of Human Trafficking and/or Torture

8 INDIVIDUALS

were referred to health clinics for medical support

2 UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

were supported with their family reunification applications under Dublin III Regulation

Our legal intervention through real-life stories

Athens

'If I had not my child, I may have committed suicide'

Pascaline, a survivor of torture and trafficking from Cameroon, faced an overwhelming situation, unable to share her harrowing experiences with asylum authorities due to fear of criminal networks in her home country and Turkey. Consequently, her asylum case received a rejection. Referred to us by the refugee community, Pascaline, accompanied by her young child, entered our office with skepticism and in a fragile psychological state.

Our compassionate team welcomed Pascaline, creating a secure space where both she and her child felt seen and heard, employing a trauma-informed approach. Gradually, Pascaline began sharing her experiences. Currently residing in an apartment with her 1 1/2-year-old child, they faced imminent eviction due to financial constraints exacerbated by the asylum rejection, since the rejection left Pascaline unable to secure legal employment.

Conducting thorough risk assessments, we linked Pascaline with our psychologist to address her psychological well-being and her child's welfare. Simultaneously, we appealed the rejection by submitting a comprehensive legal report. As we await the new decision, our steadfast support continues.

Recognizing the importance of financial stability, we also assisted Pascaline in securing a job training. Now, with legal documentation in hand, she is set to start looking for a job. Pascaline is also actively engaging in healing and community meetings we organize. Our holistic approach aims not only to address immediate challenges but also to empower individuals like Pascaline to build sustainable and dignified lives beyond the constraints of their past.

Our commitment is to create a safety net around Pascaline and her child, ensuring they have the necessary support to navigate through challenging circumstances. Through our holistic approach, encompassing legal, psychological, and community-oriented assistance, we strive to empower individuals like Pascaline to rebuild their lives with dignity and resilience.



Our legal intervention through real-life stories

Athens

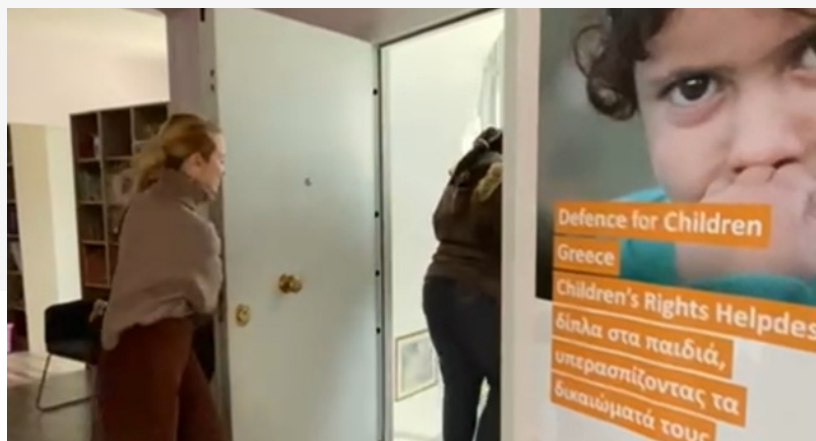
‘I was feeling so insecure going alone at the asylum interview. Now I am ready and more confident.’

In Athens, a 19-year-old woman is navigating life alone in a shared apartment, dealing with a pervasive sense of insecurity. With her asylum interview scheduled for February, our team took proactive steps, engaging in comprehensive legal preparation sessions to ensure she is well-equipped for the process.

Recognizing the crucial need to support her asylum claim and substantiate her status as a victim of torture, we supported her accessing the torture identification procedure. However, due to the limited capacity of the NGO responsible for conducting the identification procedure, a considerable waiting list has emerged.

In the meantime, we remained steadfast in our support, offering reassurance and encouragement to the young woman. Acknowledging the pressing need for secure accommodation, we supported her in registering at a camp—the sole available option for asylum seekers. Amidst these challenges, our commitment to her well-being extends beyond legal preparation. The young woman actively participates in our healing sessions, providing her with a supportive space to cope with the emotional toll of her experiences and prepare for the asylum interview ahead.

The story of Sita highlights a critical issue in the asylum process—the challenges faced by individuals awaiting the torture identification procedure. The extended waiting list exemplifies the broader systemic issues within the asylum system. Emphasizing the need for urgent reform in these procedures is crucial to guaranteeing timely and effective support for survivors of torture and their asylum claims.





For security reasons, the names and photos of the individuals in the stories shared in the report do not correspond to the actual individuals and their names in the stories.

Stronger together



DCI-Greece's legal programme run with the support of **Flüchtlingshilfe Doro Blancke Organization** reconfirmed itself as a constant in the provision of legal support to the camp residents of Kara Tepe and Mavrovouni, and the community volunteers in Parea.