



# IMPACT REPORT

LEGAL INTERVENTION PROJECT  
DORO BLANCKE  
FLUCHTLINGSHILFE/DCI-GREECE'



# OUR INTERVENTION

## - LESVOS -

From **February to April 2022**, in the context of our legal program run in collaboration with and funded by Doro Blancke and her Organization **Flüchtlingshilfe Doro Blancke**, we have legally supported **43 individuals including single mothers, unaccompanied minors, youth and families**.

Our robust legal intervention includes the below mentioned activities:

### Implemented Activities

- Risk Identification and Vulnerability assessment
- Legal support and representation through individually tailored legal sessions and asylum interview simulations
- Draft personalized legal memos to support the above-mentioned legal actions before the 1st and 2nd degree for each of both procedures (Admissibility and Asylum Eligibility)
  - Delivery of legal information on their rights and procedures
  - Referrals for access to psycho-social support
  - Extensive follow-up case management

In our legal intervention program, we first conduct a preliminary Risk Assessment interview aiming to **assess the risks and needs** of each specific individual. This is followed by the development of an **individually tailored action plan** with the next required steps in order to receive legal documentation and protection adjusted to their particular needs. Preparatory legal **sessions- in the form of an Asylum Simulation-** are conducted before each scheduled asylum interview. In the context of these sessions our beneficiaries are also receiving vital information about their rights and the existing procedures in Greece, as well as, guidance on important matters of concern to them. In the continuity, the draft and submission of individually tailored **legal memos for each one of the stages in the entire asylum process come to complement our intervention in the most meaningful way**. As we approach every case uniquely, we extend our support by trying to cover additional legal needs that might emerge along the process such as: Age Assessment procedures, recognition of SGBV survivors, and victims of torture.

Our Legal Intervention project has become a **key one** on the island of Lesbos, in upholding asylum seekers' human rights, by ensuring their fair and efficient access to the asylum procedures. Referrals are being received by various actors on the island, such as UNHCR and EASO, while the last 2 months we expanded our support to unaccompanied minors arriving on the island, through the referral pathway we developed with IOM Organization which is the responsible actor for one of the safe zones of unaccompanied minors.

The space provided by **Flüchtlingshilfe Doro Blancke Organisation** has made it possible to **create a safe place** to meet the persons of concern and offer them our best in the context of a collaborative team that keeps holistically approaching the needs of the people we cross paths with.

# OUR BENEFICIARIES

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-Single women and/or mothers victims of trafficking and FGM survivors

-Young Refugees (18 - 24 years old)

-Unaccompanied Minors

-Vulnerable Families

## Countries of Origin:

Palestine, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cameroon,  
Democratic Republic of Congo



## STRATEGIC AIM & ADVOCACY

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The aim of this legal intervention has been the **provision of effective legal support and representation**, as well as, extensive **holistic case management** to the asylum seekers in Greece with a particular focus on the situation on the island of Lesbos as well as Athens.

In the light of the current policies issued by the Greek Government through the Ministerial Decision aiming to deprive asylum seekers of legal support upon their arrival to Greece and deport them to Turkey in the context of the Safe Third Country concept, our legal project had a very crucial role to play in interrupting these Governmental (and EU's) plans.

Ensuring access to the new arrivals and taking over their legal representation from the initial stage of the Admissibility (newly set up) procedure are identified as the main elements of our targeted successful intervention. We have already managed to secure positive asylum admissibility results for our beneficiaries and secure them from deportation to Turkey, while we are still fighting on their eligibility asylum claims.

On top of that, the majority of our beneficiaries are characterized as serious SGBV/Trafficking cases and with our intervention, we have managed to initiate a due vulnerability assessment procedure on their merits which will be proven beneficial for their Asylum cases, as well as, their access to psycho-social support.

Another important element of our strategic work is the **advocacy material and the relevant activities** that are planned based on the first-hand information received while operating in the context of legal intervention.

As an example, we have drafted two reports reflecting on the current situation in Greece as a host country for thousands of refugees. On top of that, we have done extensive **advocacy before the UN Human Rights Council and the UN CRC Committee** delivering public statements and submitting legal expert reports. Lastly, we **intervened when Greece was examined under the UN Universal Periodic Review for its compliance with the human rights law** applicable.

We find it crucial to translate our delivery of services into concrete advocacy initiatives targeting a structural change in receiving and responding to the claim of people in need of international protection.



# WHAT ARE THE LEGAL NEEDS OF ASYLUM APPLICANTS IN GREECE - CURRENT CONTEXT -

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## *Lack of Legal Support/Representation of asylum applicants in Greece*

Some of the organizations that were operating on the island of Lesbos decided to move these past 3 months to the Mainland, leaving the remaining asylum seekers and those who continue to arrive, with a lesser chance of accessing services such as legal support and the possibility of being legally represented throughout their Asylum procedures.

## *Ukrainian war and its devastating impact on the refugee population*

One more crucial parameter in the equation is the outbreak of the war in Ukraine which has had a tremendous impact on the treatment of the non-Ukrainian refugee population as one of the secondary categories. This contrast in reception and response of the people fleeing Ukraine and those arriving from other parts of the world mirrors how racism shapes the way Europe is exercising its humanitarian response. While at the same time exceeds the marginalization and deprivation of support the rest of the refugees experience. It is **more urgent than ever** to guarantee that reception policy, legal pathways and delivery of services will be accessible to all people regardless of ethnicity and skin color.



# Athens

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During this reporting period, DCI Greece legally supported **16 vulnerable individuals** including **unaccompanied minors, single mothers, and single fathers currently residing in Athens.**

In relation to the cases supported on the mainland, our legal intervention had a **profound impact** on protecting our minor beneficiaries from homelessness and exploitation by offering them access to official accommodation and asylum procedures. At the same time vulnerable single mothers with their children who had been transferred to Athens from the islands or arrived through the borders of Evros, they all received due legal support with their asylum interviews or human trafficking recognition procedure.



## Current Context on the mainland:

Great delays have been identified, regarding the asylum procedure. The majority of refugees entering from Evros borders and reaching other areas in the mainland, such as Athens, are forced to wait months for an appointment in order to apply for asylum.

Unfortunately, this applies also to refugees with vulnerabilities, such as health issues, and disabilities, but also to unaccompanied minors, single mothers, and families with children. Being unregistered prevents refugees from having documentation and, as a consequence, impedes their access to basic human rights, such as healthcare, education, housing, and legal support.

At the moment, hundreds of single young women and/or mothers mainly of African Origin are living in the region of Athens inside camps or living in shared apartments with men. These women who are basically out of the radar of the state, do not receive any legal or psycho-social support, thus being an easy prey for exploitation.

Regarding unaccompanied minors, even more issues have occurred, since the launch of the 'emergency tracing mechanism' by the Ministry of Migration. This new service is supposed to substitute the non-existing guardianship system, by providing protection services and immediate access to housing, for all unaccompanied minors in Athens.

Unfortunately, in practice, this is not the case. Following the procedure, minors are first transferred to a police station for their data to be verified and undergo an unofficial 'age assessment' process, where police officers estimate the child's age by their facial characteristics. This procedure lacks child-friendly principles and is not being conducted according to international standards, thus increasing the risk of a minor being registered as an adult. The next step, which includes the conduct of several medical tests can take up to several days, thus leaving in the meantime children on the streets. Following all these procedures, minors get transferred to temporary camps for up to 4 weeks, until they are finally placed in a safe shelter for minors. During all this time, they receive no psychological or legal support.



## OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL STORIES

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### Single mother from Somalia with 3 children

*"Despite the difficulties, I manage to smile. My girls are finally safe from Female Genital Mutilation. What more could I ask for?"*

When she was a child, due to a compulsory tradition in her culture, she was a victim of FGM twice, despite the fact that her father tried to oppose this practice. Years later, while living in Mogadishu with her husband and her three children, one of the clans that are active in the area invaded their place asking for her husband. She was at home with her children and got brutally beaten up. They beat her, hit her in the face, and stabbed her, while killing her husband. Wanting to save her children she did not have any other option rather than leaving Somalia to protect them.

After a long and dangerous journey, she arrived in Lesbos. From the very beginning, we were surprised by the willpower of this mother who, despite having suffered a lot, her only thought was to protect her children, from the atrocities taking place and the risk of FGM.

She is still struggling daily with her trauma and physical pain, but with the support of DCI-GR she and her children **received refugee status** in Greece, allowing her, at last, to start a new life. However, this was not a straightforward and simple process. As a person coming from Somalia, she had to undergo an additional, bureaucratic obstacle, the admissibility interview. Refugees from 5 countries (Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan) are obliged to undergo this additional step, so as not to be deported back to Turkey and have the right to attend an asylum interview in Greece.

Two legal memos and several asylum interview simulations after, **the positive decision was finally issued**. She is a true example of resilience, capable of overcoming any obstacle to ensure a better future for herself and her children.



## OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL STORIES

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Single young woman, Sierra Leone

*“I left my country to save myself and many other young girls' lives. I hope that with me, the evil will stop”*

After her father passed away when she was 11 years old, her mother introduced her to the Buntu society, where she was a leader. While she was still a child, her genitals were amputated, twice. In 2021, her mother died and the young girl was called to fill her position, as a leader. Having experienced such atrocities, and knowing that she didn't want to be responsible for them, she decided to embark on the journey to flee her country.

After our first meeting, an individually tailored plan was organized. A referral was made for psychological and medical support. At the same time, the extensive preparation for her asylum interview started, with multiple sessions taking place.

A legal memo was also submitted to further strengthen her case. Being extremely vulnerable, DCI GR also took all necessary legal actions for her so as to be transferred to a safe facility on the mainland. Two weeks after, **her geographical restriction was uplifted, while in April she also received her positive asylum decision.**



## OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL STORIES

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### Young boy from Palestine

*“I went through all of this for one reason: Freedom”*

Despite his young age, he has never backed down to defend his community and its freedom. While living in Gaza, he was arrested several times by Hamas, and kept in detention, suffering physical violence. His dream to live as a free human being urged him to leave Palestine and seek a safe haven in a European country.

DCI-GR supported him throughout his asylum case, by preparing him for his asylum interview and submitting a legal memo. A few days later, we were informed about his **positive decision**. As he told us ‘**This is such a special day for me. Thank you for helping me regain my freedom. Now I can live in safety and peace.**’



### Young woman from Guinea

*“I am not alone anymore”*

In Lesvos, the vulnerability of this young woman has been recognized and she was placed in one of the “safe zones” for vulnerable and UAMs present on the island. However, after turning 20 years old, due to the age limit, she had to leave the shelter. Her only option was to live on the streets of Lesvos, which would have meant a higher risk for a young woman in her condition.

DCI-GR, in collaboration with Doro and her organization, made it possible to find a long-term accommodation solution for this young woman, providing her with a safe place. When Doro and our lawyers met her she was very shy, and when we offered her support and understanding she burst into tears because she realized she was no longer alone.



## OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL STORIES

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### Young boy from Bangladesh

*"Thank you. I thought I would never leave this place"*

15-year-old boy from Bangladesh left his home country because of his religion.

After reading the Bible, he decided to become a Cristian. When he arrived in Athens, he was completely unregistered, invisible to the official protection system. He lived in a shared apartment with 16 other adults, sleeping on the balcony. We immediately involved all the authorities, to ensure all his rights will be protected.

After our intervention, he managed to get registered within a few days, and also apply for family reunification with his sister in Italy. In the meantime, a safe shelter for minors was granted to him. After submitting all necessary documents, along with the Best Interest Assessment and additional legal reports to support his family reunification case, a positive decision was received. Following the acceptance of his application, we kept putting pressure on the authorities, and the boy finally received his tickets!

A few days ago, he traveled to Italy and he is finally safe with his sister.



## OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL STORIES

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### Single mother from Congo. Survivor of trafficking and torture

*"I can finally sleep at night"*

In Congo, from a very young age, she was forced to face many difficult situations. She was imprisoned by the State and was tortured for months until she was finally released. The police officers even proceeded in amputating one of her fingers. In addition to this abuse, she was raped countless times.

A man that appeared to be kind, offered to help her travel to Europe. However, when they reached Turkey, his behavior changed. The man forced her to sleep with multiple men every day, by threatening to kill her. She became pregnant and decided to escape. After many attempts, she finally reached Greece.

Our team provided support with her asylum interview, by preparing her extensively. The woman was not even aware that she was trafficked and was not planning to make any mention of her experiences outside Congo.

At the same time, we started working on her obtaining documentation as proof of the torture she suffered. Within a few days, and after involving all responsible authorities, the certificate of torture was issued and submitted to the asylum office.

It was accompanied by a detailed legal report, to further strengthen her case.

Two weeks later, the woman and her son received international protection. Through our referral pathway, they were also granted access to psychosocial support.

### Young single mother, Congo

*"For the first time, I feel optimistic. Things will go well for us"*

This 19-year-old mother, coming from Congo to claim asylum in Greece, was 8 months pregnant, unregistered, and homeless. She faced unprecedented obstacles in her effort to find safety for herself and her unborn child.

After our intervention, the mother received all the necessary support in order to deliver her newborn safely. However, that was not enough. The mother and her baby remained unregistered, invisible to the Greek State, and unable to exercise their social rights.

We immediately involved all relevant authorities, explaining their precarious situation. Legal report after legal report, there was finally a positive result. They both got registered and obtained the relevant documentation as asylum seekers.

Finding permanent housing and access to social rights is the next big obstacle to overcome. We will keep supporting them until we ensure all their rights are being respected while living in dignity and safety. We will also remain by their side during the next steps of their asylum journey, the asylum interview, in order for their pain to be recognized.

## OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL STORIES

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### Young mother from Somalia, survivor of FGM and forced marriage

*“I just wish that me and my son will be safe”*

When she was just a child she was orphaned by both parents and started living with her uncle and his family. Her uncle, following the FGM cultural tradition of Somalia, forced her to undergo this practice twice, once when she was 8 years old and then when she was 11 years old. At the age of 13, she was sold by him to an old man and got married.

After 3 years of constant physical and sexual abuse, she took the decision to leave her country to save herself and her child.

We met both of them a few weeks after their arrival on the island. Coming from Somalia, we had first to receive a positive decision on their admissibility interview, so as their asylum application to be examined by the Greek authorities. Alongside the legal support with the preparation for the interview and the regular follow-ups, DCI-GR linked her with a gynecologist who specialized in FGM and a psychologist, and her little boy with a pediatrician suited to his needs.

Through our legal intervention, we managed to secure a **positive asylum admissibility result** for them and protect them from deportation to Turkey, at the moment we are working on their eligibility asylum interview.



## OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL STORIES

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### Single woman from Cameroon, victim of human trafficking

*“I can not recognize the reflection in the mirror. I want my identity back”*

After living on the street, facing multiple risks, and giving birth to her daughter, this woman had to flee her country to escape from her husband's life threats. Throughout her journey, she was sold and bought for sexual exploitation, where her smugglers forced her to change her look and have sex with multiple men.

Once the quarantine ended, our team met her and immediately started preparing her for her asylum interview. At the same time, we linked her with a qualified psychologist, while currently, we are working so as to be legally recognized as a victim of trafficking.

Thanks to the active involvement of DCI-GR throughout her case, the woman received **a positive decision and Greece recognized her as suitable for international protection. As she told us 'I cannot believe it that I am finally safe.'**



## OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL STORIES

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### **Alleged Minor from Somalia, registered as 20 years old**

*'They registered me as an adult without even asking my date of birth'*

In March DCI GR received a referral from UNHCR, regarding an asylum applicant with 2 rejections on his asylum application, who was claiming that the authorities upon his arrival registered him as an adult, without even asking his date of birth. DCI GR upon receiving the request met the boy and proceeded with all required actions so as to identify whether the authorities conducted an age assessment before registering him as such.

Age is a criterion of great importance in the asylum procedure for identifying vulnerable asylum applicants. The age needs to be identified as soon as possible so as the child to benefit from special procedural guarantees and adapted reception conditions.

In our case, his a priori registration as an adult impeded him from accessing and exercising the rights that he would be entitled to as a child, such as his right to safe and proper accommodation.

DCI Gr submitted a legal report raising doubts about his age written, urging the competent authorities to respect the benefit of the doubt and the best interest of the child and to conduct immediately an age assessment.

A few days later, they responded positively to our request. At the moment, the applicant undergoes a medical examination so that his age to be identified.

This case highlights one of the big problems in Greece: the misidentification of children at the borders and the difficulty to reverse the registration. We find that officials who register new arrivals often arbitrarily record children's ages as older than the children themselves give, and this has been happening for years, seemingly without any improvement recorded.

## OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL STORIES

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### Family from Afghanistan

*“I would like to thank everyone working in this field. You understand the difficulties and problems and what we have gone through. With your behavior, we understood what humanity means ”*

After the Taliban insurrection, the family who used to work in a humanitarian organization focused on women's rights had to flee Afghanistan to escape the violence enacted by this extremist group. Mother, father, and their two children undertook the turbulent journey to Europe. When they arrived in Turkey, they experienced great institutional violence from the police officers at the borders. The police beat all family members and injured them severely. Moreover, the mother was sexually molested. After their abuse, they were deported back to Iran. It took several tries and more dangers to reenter Turkey, and then Greece. Once they arrived, they spent the first days in the jungle of Lesvos, far from the state radar, because they were afraid they would experience the same violent behavior.

We supported the family in the preparation for their admissibility interview at the asylum office and drafted a legal memo to support their case. Unfortunately, despite the institutional violence, they experienced, and despite the fact that they did not even have the opportunity to ask for asylum in Turkey, their application was rejected in the first degree. This is, unfortunately, a very common strategy that the Greek State is following with Afghan applicants, especially single men and families.

Our team will keep supporting them with the appeal of the decision, whereby extensively preparing them and, once again, submitting a legal report, we will try to overcome this obstacle and turn around the negative decision. We will also provide our aid throughout their next steps as well as when the time for their asylum interview arrives.

At the same time, all family members, that are deeply traumatized by these events, receive specialized medical and psychological support, through our referral pathway, with the hope of finally healing, both physically and mentally.

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PROJECT WE HAVE SUPPORTED  
IN TOTAL **74 CASES** WHICH AMOUNT TO **113 INDIVIDUALS**.

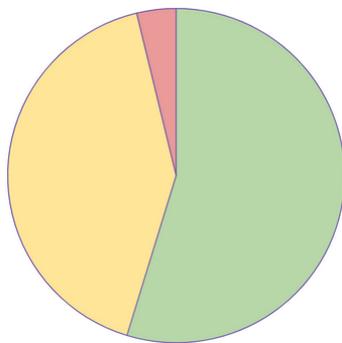
## LESVOS

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In total **86 individuals**

From them:

- **54 individuals** were supported with their **Asylum Applications**



● 30 individuals were already granted **Refugee Status**

● 22 individuals are still **waiting for the decision**

● 2 individuals received a rejection

- **24 individuals** received legal support with their subsequent asylum applications . For these individuals, the results are still pending.

-**8 individuals** received support with access to fair age assessment procedures, safe accommodation and SGBV/Victims of torture recognition

### Countries of Origin:

Palestine, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cameroon

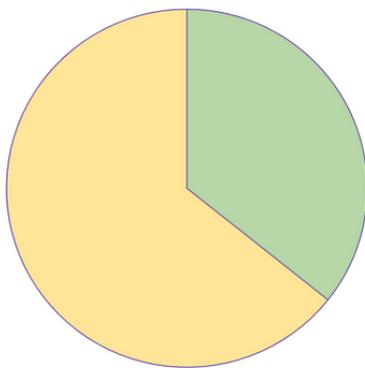
## ATHENS

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In total 27 individuals

From them:

- 15 individuals were supported with their Asylum Applications including family reunification



● 2 individuals were granted Refugee Status while 3 unaccompanied minors received a positive decision with their family reunification case (under Dublin III)

● 9 are still waiting their asylum decision, while 1 child is waiting the decision on his family reunification application.

-5 individuals received support with their subsequent applications. For these individuals, the results are still pending.

-7 individuals received legal support with accessing Asylum Registration, Registration Interview and finding Accommodation

### Countries of Origin:

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo



*#StrongerTogether*

