

## LEGAL INTERVENTION PROJECT IN LESVOS



Reporting Period: June - September 2022

# OUR INTERVENTION

## - LESVOS -

Over the period of time from June to September 2022, the legal program running on Lesbos reached and legally supported **106 individuals**, among which **families, single mothers, women survivors of trafficking and/or FGM, youth transitioning to adulthood, single men and unaccompanied minors**. The success of the programme, could not have been achieved without the strong cooperation and with the financial support of **Doro Blancke's Organization: Flüchtlingshilfe Doro Blancke**.

### Our intervention includes:

- Contact/Initial meeting to assess and identify possible risks and vulnerability
- Tailored individual legal sessions and asylum interview simulations
- 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
- Effective/Strong cooperation network among the actors in the field to support efficient referral pathways
- Capacity Building through trainings to front line professionals working on the field

Our first course of action first includes 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.

From that moment, our network of cooperation is put in place, allowing us to communicate with other actors active in the field to provide holistic support in accordance with the rights of each person.

Starting from preparatory legal sessions in the form of Asylum Interview simulations before the actual scheduled interview, our beneficiaries receive proper guidance and explanation of crucial information about their rights and the conduct of asylum procedures in Greece. Our team undertakes to draw up and submit a detailed individual legal memo for each one of the stages along the entire asylum process to provide a complete and dedicated intervention. 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: Provision of individual and group info sessions for asylum-seekers with rejection/s, Age Assessment procedures, and recognition of SGBV survivors, and victims of torture and/or human trafficking.

Our Legal project has become a **key intervention** on the island of Lesbos, as it has become necessary for the efficient legal support and representation for asylum applicants in upholding their rights and ensuring fair and effective access to asylum procedures. Our main referral pathway comes from different actors working in the field, such as EASO, IOM, and UNHCR. For our part, we further strengthened the cooperation with multiple actors, such as MSF, MVI, Intersos, ΜΕΤΑδραση, etc, for the referral of beneficiaries in need of psychological support, medical treatment, education, certification of torture, etc.

The space provided by **Flüchtlingshilfe Doro Blancke Organisation** operates as a focal point where our beneficiaries receive our services in a safe place for them.

# OUR INTERVENTION

## - LESVOS -

Providing **information sessions** to asylum seekers and **capacity building** for Front Line Professionals is another important objective of our Legal Intervention.

Our sessions are addressed to:

### 1. Asylum Seekers

The aim of the info sessions is to inform applicants of international protection about the asylum procedures and important deadlines. Our experience has shown that most of the time people on the move are not aware of the asylum process and the reason why they have to undergo these procedures. Not being aware of the procedures and existing deadlines can have a negative impact on their asylum applications.

**Specific Info Legal Sessions** have also been developed for the women beneficiaries regarding Human Trafficking, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Forced Marriage, and Gender-Based Violence. Women usually speak superficially about their experiences and therefore run the risk of being considered untrustworthy in the asylum procedure. At the same time, many do not even mention that are survivors of FGM or human trafficking, while others cannot convey such experiences in the right wording, thus running the risk of their asylum application being rejected.

In relation to that, during a recent meeting with UNHCR and the legal actors working on Lesvos, it emerged the need and the importance to schedule personal and/or group legal info sessions for all the camp residents with rejections to help them navigate through the asylum procedures, by enforcing their rights. DCI-Greece, in collaboration with Flüchtlingshilfe Doro Blancke, already developed an online referral pathway, targeting, as pilot info sessions, women of the African region.

Already, one massive info session was scheduled in July, where approximately **30 asylum seekers** with rejections from Somalia attended, while **22 individuals** of different nationalities have dropped by at our offices in Parea to receive legal and updated information about their asylum claims.

### 2. Front Line Professionals

Asylum Procedures are demanding, complex, and constantly changing. In our work with refugees, it is important to make sure that we as professionals are offering proper information so as to guarantee people's fair access to the asylum procedures and the legal options available to them but also their safety and protection. Through our legal session on Asylum Procedures, we delve into the Greek asylum context and delineate the challenges asylum seekers face while navigating the asylum system.

In July, in the context of the legal intervention, the first working group for **Frontline professionals** was implemented, where **24 individuals** (employees and volunteers) from the organizations present in the Parea community center on Lesvos actively took part.



Photos from the legal session on Administrative Procedures delivered to Front Line Professionals working in Lesvos Island back in July 2022

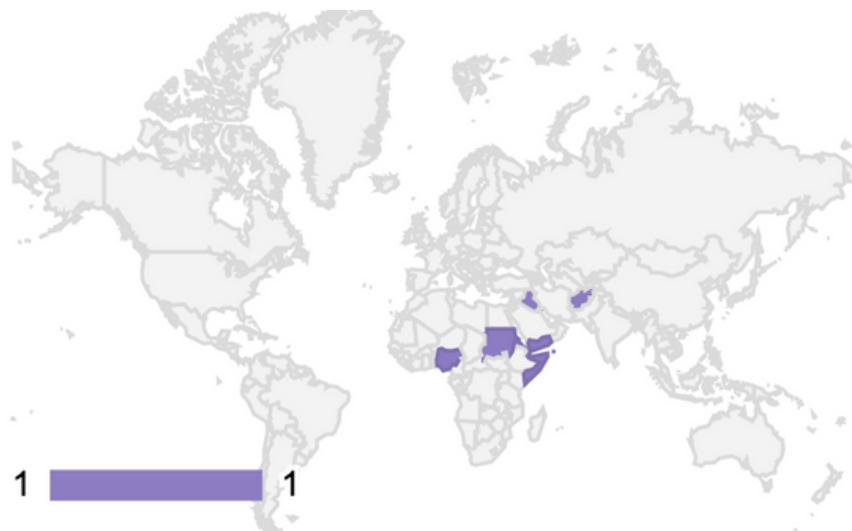
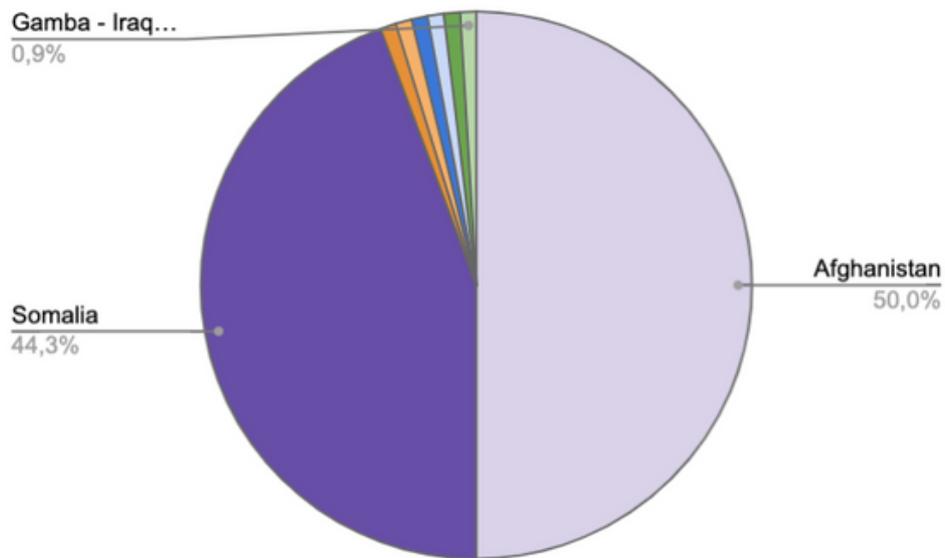
# OUR BENEFICIARIES

## - LESVOS -

- Families
- Single mothers
- Women survivors of trafficking and/or FGM
- Youth, currently transitioning to adulthood
- Single men
- Unaccompanied Minors

### Countries of Origin:

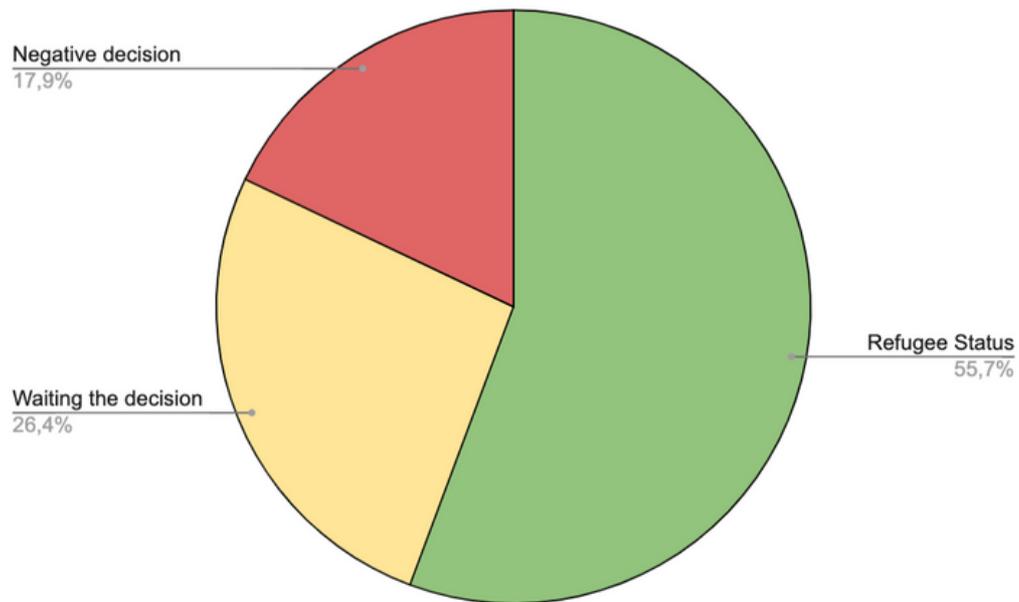
Afghanistan, Somalia, Gambia, Iraq, Eritrea, Sudan, Yemen, and Nigeria



# LESVOS

DURING THIS REPORTING PERIOD, A TOTAL OF **106 INDIVIDUALS** WERE SUPPORTED WITH THEIR ASYLUM APPLICATIONS

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From the 106 individuals:

- 59 individuals already granted **Refugee Status**
- 28 individuals are still **waiting for the decision**
- 19 individuals received a **rejection**

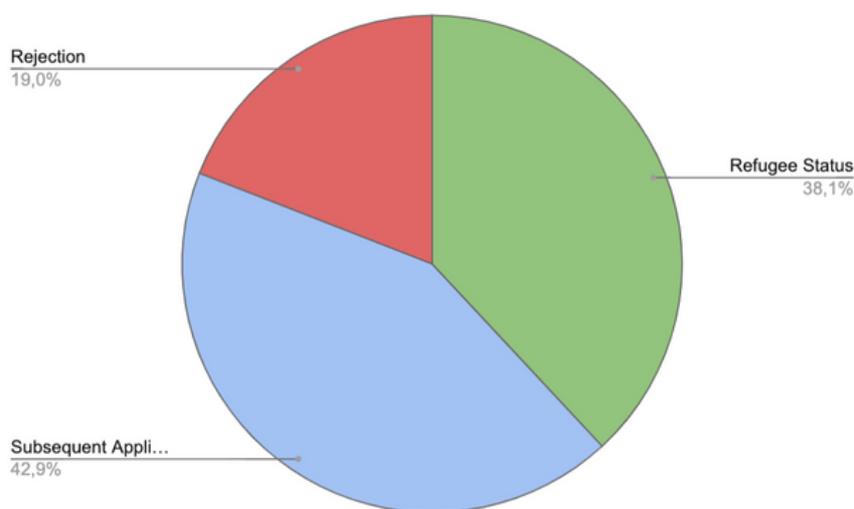
# LESVOS

## FOLLOW-UP ON PREVIOUSLY REJECTED CASES

In total of 21 individuals

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DURING THIS REPORTING PERIOD, WE KEPT FIGHTING TO TURNAROUND THE REJECTIONS RECEIVED BY THE 21 INDIVIDUALS FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORTING PERIOD (FEB-MAY)



After our Legal Intervention:

- 8 individuals received **International Protection**
- 10 individuals are **waiting for a decision** on their appeal / subsequent Application
- 3 individuals received a **rejection**

# OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - LESVOS -

## Afghan Family of 5

*“I fled my Country with my family in need of some humanity. How can you call yourself human if you turn down a child suffering”*

Amir, Latifa, and their three children fled Afghanistan following the Taliban insurrection. Amir used to work in the American guard, reason why he and his family started receiving death threats from the terrorist group.

The journey from Afghanistan to Turkey was long and full of dangers. While crossing the borders from Iran to Turkey, they were arrested by the police, beaten up severely and were pushed back to Iran. During these incidents, their 4-years-old daughter got injured in her eyes.

After several more attempts and more brutality from Turkish police, they finally reached Turkey.

In Turkey, they tried to apply for asylum countless times but they were always rejected without even having the possibility to have a formal interview. They visited the hospital in Istanbul as well, in order to receive some treatments for their daughter, but no one helped them due to the fact that they had no legal documentation to stay in the country.

After a few unsuccessful attempts, they finally reached Lesbos.

Within one week from their arrival, our team was called to assist and first ran a vulnerability and needs assessment. After ensuring that all the family members could have access to proper medical care (physical and psychological), we provided them with critical legal information about the relevance of what they experienced in Turkey, with the admissibility interview. We also drafted a legal memorandum, to support their claim.

Amir and his family were considered admissible, and able to undergo the eligibility interview, for which our programme will keep supporting them.



# OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - LESVOS -

## Young girl from Somalia

*'Thank you for helping me. I knew I could prove my truth.'*

Amina is a 16 year old girl from Somalia. She left her country of origin, because she suffered countless brutalities. She was also a victim of double FGM.

When she was in Turkey, she was raped by multiple men. She was unable to seek medical help, and she was too afraid to ask the police for protection, due to lack of documentation.

She arrived in Greece and was registered as an adult, even though she was only 16. After drafting an individually tailored plan to support her and undertaking her whole case management, we managed to initiate the age assessment procedure in the camp, that proved her real age, right before she was about to undertake an admissibility interview as an adult.

Amina was immediately transferred to a shelter for minors, where we kept legally supporting her. We prepared her for the admissibility interview, and submitted the necessary legal report to further strengthen her case. After receiving a successful result, we provided support to her asylum interview as well, which was also successful.

Without our intervention, the unaccompanied girl would not be able to go through fair asylum procedures, as her application would have been examined as an adult. She is now safe and happy, going to school to gain the necessary tools to build her own life, when she becomes an adult.



# OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - LESVOS -

## Single mother from Gambia

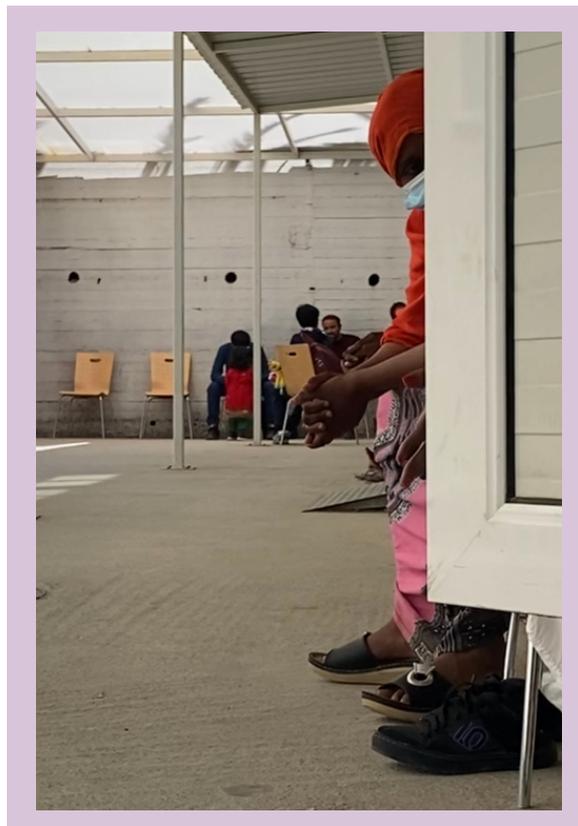
*“I suffered a lot along the way. It was not easy, but I stayed strong. Now, I am finally calm and hopeful. Everything will go well”*

Linda, a young mother of three from Gambia, is one of the beneficiaries of our legal program on Lesbos. Back in her country, she suffered extreme State violence. She was also unlawfully separated from her children and forced to leave.

Once in Turkey, she discovered that the person that offered her help had 'sold' her. She was sexually exploited for months, and became pregnant. After a few terrible months, she managed to escape and reached Greece.

When we were requested to immediately assist her, we initiated an intense legal plan, by alerting as well our cooperation network in order to recognize her as a victim of human trafficking. By undertaking her whole case management, Linda finally received Refugee Status, enjoying the protection she deserves.

Despite the positive outcome, our work is not over. Linda expressed multiple times her wish to be reunited with her children, who are still in Cameroon. Although the process is very complex and lengthy, we managed to create a link with the competent authorities in Greece and abroad, hoping to see mother and child soon reunited.



# OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES

## - LESVOS -

### Afghan Family of 6

*'We left Kabul to guarantee our freedom and a safe future for our children. Once in Greece, we asked for asylum but our interview was about Turkey. Few days ago, our application was rejected. They are telling us now to go back to Turkey. But while we were in Turkey, we also received a deportation letter. They are treating us like a ping - pong ball'*

During the 1st Taliban occupation, the father of this family was a general in charge of protecting the country from the terrorist group. When the Taliban came again in August 2020, they started targeting him and his family due to past conflicts.

The family, with 4 children from 2 to 13 years old had to flee Afghanistan within one hour. Their journey was long and full of dangers, especially for children that small.

Once in Turkey, they requested a residence permit, but their application was rejected without explanation. They were also arrested, and kept in detention for 4 months. Their children had to sleep on the floor, sharing a loaf of bread as the sole meal of their day. When they were set free, they were handed a deportation document.

In Greece, they went through the admissibility interview, without having access to legal aid. Despite their traumatic experiences in the country, they were rejected.

Our team was called to assist them, after that rejection. The family had not even fully understood the meaning of this interview. We supported them in appealing this negative decision, and we submitted a legal document in support of the information provided by the family.

Two 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.

With the constant support of our organization throughout the different procedures, two months after their arrival, the whole family received refugee status and it's now waiting for their documents to be issued to start their new life.

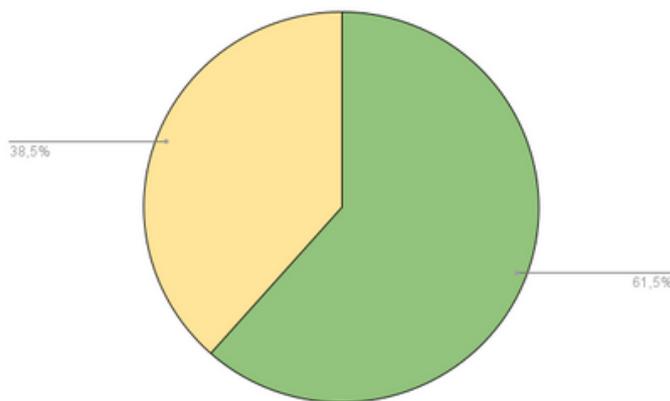


# ATHENS

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## In total 25 individuals

All of them were supported with their Asylum Applications, including family reunification



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

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

### Additionally:

- 5 individuals received support with their subsequent applications. For 3 of them, their case was reopened, and for the rest, the results are still pending.
- 7 individuals received legal support with accessing Asylum Registration, Registration Interview and finding Accommodation

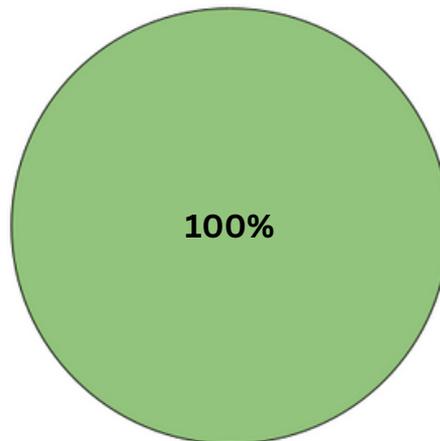
### Countries of Origin:

Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Bangladesh, Pakistan

## ATHENS FOLLOW-UP ON PENDING CASES

DURING THIS REPORTING PERIOD WE KEPT SUPPORTING THE **10 INDIVIDUALS** THAT HAD PENDING CASES IN THE PREVIOUS MONTHS

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From the **10 individuals** that were waiting a decision on the refugee status or family reunification:

- 9 individuals, received **International Protection**
- 1 unaccompanied minor received **a positive family reunification decision**, under Dublin III

## OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - ATHENS -

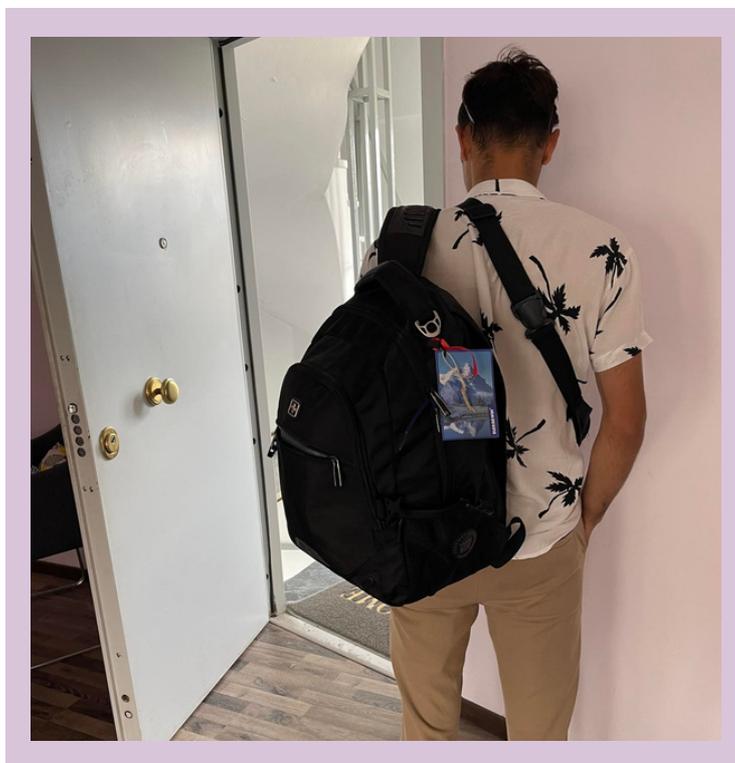
*'I live with the fear that the police will arrest me and deport me back'*

17 year old M. left Afghanistan with his family. While crossing the borders through Evros, he was separated from his parents and siblings. He is still not aware of their whereabouts, whether they are dead or alive. For many days M. had to live rough on the streets of Komotini city, without having access to food and accommodation. One night and while he was sleeping on a bench, he was subjected to racist attack by a group of men, who stole everything in his possession and left him bleeding. Due to lack of documentation, he was afraid to go to the police or even to ask for medical help.

M. reached Athens, where he remained homeless for many nights. He was unregistered, invisible and constantly afraid that if the police will caught him he will be deported back to Turkey, as it happened to some people that he met in Komotini.

When M. first entered our offices, he said *' I just need a place to rest without being afraid and someone to help me find my family.'* Our team immediately activated the whole system regarding his case, aiming to bring M. into a place of safety and visibility before the official authorities. A place that will act as a safeguard, that he will no longer have to wander as a 'ghost' in the city, exposed to so many risks.

M. already has a scheduled registration appointment at the asylum office. In the coming days he will be transferred to a safe shelter for minors. In the meantime, our team of experts offer him legal information about his asylum preparation, while linking him to other actors.



M. leaving our office with our Care Bag that contains essential relief items for people living in precarious conditions

# OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES

## - ATHENS -

### *"I can finally breathe"*

L. is a 30 year old woman from Congo. She has two children, one of them newborn. L. did not have access to legal assistance, when she underwent her first and second degree asylum Interview. Even though her claim was very strong, it was not expressed correctly and she left out important parts of her story. L. and her children no longer had identification documents, they were homeless, wandering the streets of Athens.

When she visited our offices, she was not aware she had the right to apply for subsequent application. We informed her about the procedures and started searching for valid reasons to reopen her case. She told us her story and it was obvious to us that L. was a victim of trafficking, from a network that started from her country of origin. When she realized it herself, she collapsed. We brought an emergency psychologist to assist her during this crisis.

After intense legal actions, she was recognized as a victim of trafficking. Her case was reopened, she and her children received legal documents, and are housed now in an apartment. The children are going to school, and her asylum interview is scheduled in 2023. We will keep supporting her, until her pain is finally recognized.



# OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES - ATHENS -

*"I prefer to die in Greece than go back to Turkey. At least, in Greece, I will die in the light, Turkey is all darkness"*

H. family left Afghanistan because the father was working as a translator for an American company. When the Taliban rose to power again, they started receiving extreme threats. The children, two teenage girls, could not even attend school, because they were scared to leave the house. This extreme persecution was not enough for the Greek state, to provide them with international protection. H. family had to prove that they were not safe in Turkey, a country that imprisoned them for 4 months, without providing food and water. They were rejected on their admissibility interview. A deportation paper was issued for them.

With the help of our team, they appealed the negative decision, and were finally able to undergo the merit asylum interview. After a few weeks, we were informed that they received international protection!

They are finally safe and building their life in Greece. The children are finally happy, going to school and taking part in other activities, such as soccer and tennis. At the same time, through our referral pathway, they receive psychological treatment, to heal their trauma from their country of origin, as well as the countless difficulties of the trip.



## OUR LEGAL INTERVENTION THROUGH REAL-LIFE STORIES

- ATHENS -

*"I am the happiest I have ever been in years. Thank you"*

R. is a 16 year old unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan. He was living in a shared apartment with adults. He applied for family reunification with his brother in France. He did not have legal assistance, so he was rejected, because he missed the three month deadline. He was devastated. When he approached us and asked for our help, we immediately started drafting his case management plan. He was transferred to a shelter for minors, but the lawyer of this shelter did not accept to continue his family reunification case. France claimed to have permanently rejected this case. We undertook it, with the hopes to reopen it. Legal report after legal report, we managed to turn this decision around. France did not only accept the reopening of the case, but also accepted the minor's request for the reunification. R. received his tickets within a few weeks from the positive decision. He is now in the safe arms of his brother and his family.



## STRATEGIC AIM AND ADVOCACY

The aim of the intervention mentioned above 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.

### - Lesbos -

According to the latest UNHCR findings, only in 2022, 1851 people on the move arrived in Lesbos Island, while more than 12.000 in Greece. The Living sites on the islands remain mainly ill-equipped or overcrowded, leaving residents exposed to security risks. At the same time, many regulations have been introduced by the Greek Government, impeding civil society to defend the rights of people on the move.

The Ministerial Decision aims to deprive refugees (those coming from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan) of legal support upon their arrival to Greece and deport them back to Turkey in the context of the Safe Third Country concept is **still in force**. Therefore, our legal project has still a very crucial role to play in interrupting these plans, by ensuring access to the new arrivals and taking over their legal representation from the initial stage of the Admissibility procedure are identified as the main elements of our targeted successful intervention.

A distinguished component of our legal program is the emphasis, from the beginning, to ensure access to new arrivals, legally supporting and representing them from the very initial stages of the asylum procedures, such as the Admissibility protocol. Among our beneficiaries, we managed to secure a fair amount of positive asylum admissibility results, **excluding the possibility of their deportation to Turkey**, hence focusing on the next step, their eligibility for asylum claims.

In this regard, a high percentage of our beneficiaries reported being FGM and SGBV survivors, allowing us 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.

Moreover, following drastic changes enacted in the past months, **multiple organizations kept leaving the island**, while the Government started implementing the transfer of selected asylum seekers to the Mainland. Although there is still no clear information on the selection method for transfers (assumed to be based on the vulnerability of each individual), the legal intervention acknowledges **the need to both provide legal support and representation to the remaining (and new) camp residents on Lesbos and organize a tailored follow-up for the beneficiaries that are transferred to the Mainland to ensure the continuation of their Asylum process.**

### - Mainland -

Arrivals through the mainland have increased in the past few months while great delays have been identified regarding the asylum procedures.

The vast majority of refugees entering from Evros borders and reaching other areas in the mainland, such as Athens, are forced to wait for months for an appointment in order to apply for asylum.

Lack of registration equals lack of visibility, which in turn can also place people on the move at higher risk of being arrested by the police and bring deported to Turkey without even prior accessing asylum procedures. **Through our intervention, we aim to bring these homeless, unregistered asylum seekers that are exposed to violence, trafficking, and exploitation, into a place of safety, legality, and visibility before the official authorities.**

## STRATEGIC AIM AND ADVOCACY

Another fundamental component of our work is the translation of the evidence we gather via the services we offer to people on the move, into concrete advocacy initiatives aiming for structural change. All these violations and evidence collected from the field during this reporting period have been presenting in many European / International high panel incognito meetings that took place during this reporting period.

On top of that, DCI Greece, following the issue of the Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on migration, took the opportunity to co ordinate a UN Side Event in Geneva, aiming to put the spotlight on Institutional violence against children on the move, the forms it can take in cross border situations, as well as, in **reception contexts**, in times of emergency.

### DCI's Expert Intervention during the 50th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva





*#StrongerTogether*