



July-September 2023

**QUARTERLY
REPORT**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Context Update

1. Summary
2. Chios Island
3. Proposed New CCAC
4. Procedures
5. Access to Services
6. Basic Needs
7. National
 - Procedure
 - Detention
 - Economy
 - Politics

Progress

8. The Team
9. Operations

Services

10. Legal Aid
11. Statistics
12. Referral
13. Challenges

Looking Forward

SUMMARY

A.Ss.I.S.T. faced some particularly difficult issues during this Quarter and the challenges to service delivery were nonetheless overcome due to both recent and current caring, capable and committed team of volunteer client services managers, on-call interpreters and Greek lawyers.

From 02 July 2023 to 01 October 2023, 17,678 people arrived on the Aegean Islands by boat from Turkey seeking international protection in Greece. Of these, 10,910 arrived between 28th of August and 01 October 2023. This sudden increase in asylum seekers may indicate a reduction or cessation in people being pushed back to Turkey when trying to reach Greece by boat. Inevitably, it has led to severe overcrowding in the Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs) most particularly on Lesbos and Samos Islands.

Added to what is always a challenging environment, due to a misunderstanding with a donor, funds allocated to forward commitments have not been received requiring reallocation of existing reserve funds across budget items while still meeting other donors' requirements. This cause significant stress and continues to require additional effort to raise fund to cover the amount lost.



CONTEXT UPDATE

CHIOS ISLAND

From 02 July 2023 to 01 October 2023, there were over 1,038 people who arrived on Chios Island by boat from Turkey and were registered for international protection at the Vial CCAC. Of these, 744 arrived in Chios between 28th of August and 01 October 2023; while, during the same period, there were 492 departures to mainland Greece. As of October 01, there were 976 asylum seekers accommodated in Vial CACC: this results in overcrowding and increased inadequacy in services in a facility built to accommodate a maximum of 840 persons. The percentages of men, women and children in the CCAC varied but remained stable. Somalis were the majority in 'nationality' followed by Palestinians with a sudden increase in Syrians and Sudanese towards the end of September.

PROPOSED NEW CCAC

Ministry of Migration (MoM) application for interim measures against Chios Municipality has been withdrawn or cancelled. It seems that the construction of a new CCAC on Chios will not go forward.



PROCEDURES

Throughout this period the CCAC services continued to experience gaps in the provision of interpreter services causing delays in registration, information provision and asylum interviews, notably Aramaic -and Tigrinya- speakers have had no interviews scheduled for many months as they are informed that there are no interpreters available. See below: "National Procedures".

In early September, the Palestinian applicants went on hunger strike demonstrating again the long delays experienced in the processing of their applications.

We have also been informed that the current Asylum Services case workers and operators will be replaced by a new team in March 2024.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

The Asylum Services have moved their offices to a site in Lefkonía, a site south of the airport between Chios and Karfas. Since 18th of September, all services and appointments are only accessible at these offices. Buses are provided for applicants with appointments returned twice daily from Vial CCAC.

On Chios, permission is given to leave the camp to go to a warehouse providing essential items and to come to town to see their lawyers. Few people leave the camp due to the cost of transport and the walk to the village to take the bus service. (4 Euros to return – last bus from Chios town leaves at 2 p.m.) The CCAC is 6.8 km from the town of Chios. Taxis are a minimum of 12 Euros one way, so even with four people, the cost is 6 Euros per person to return. With only 70.00 Euros for a single adult, and that once they are registered with the relevant program, extra food and some other essentials must take priority. It can take two months before the applicants receive a cash card. Below is a summary of comments made by the CCAC residents:

BASIC NEEDS

Food – children received powdered milk, but it is not drinkable for many. Not enough food, x 3 times a day but the portions are not enough for an adult. Breakfast: one piece of bread (a roll) and an apple or 2 boiled eggs, small juice, (no bread) no condiments. Drinking water: 2 bottles x 1,5 lit provided at breakfast. Lunch: potatoes with a little meat: every day it is potatoes, no drinks.

Dinner – pasta and sauce (unsalted) or plain rice with chickpeas or beans (unsalted).

No tea or other drinks provided for adults.

Drinking Water – 2 X 1.5 LT Per person per day is not enough.

Water – no running water available in bathroom and outdoor taps from midday to 6 a.m.

Hygiene Kits – small and once only: toothbrush, hand washer, soap... consumable items (soap and toothpaste) are short-lived.

Clothes – it is already cold at night and winter clothes distributions are not likely to start until November 2023. Many people have only t-shirts, no pullovers or jackets.

Living Space – 9 people per container average and some sleep on the floor.

Bedding – (mattress, one sheet, no pillow, sleeping bag for pre-September arrivals mainly)

Access to the Clinic – many people with serious complaints are not being attended to, waiting times are very long. Nurses only, no doctor(s) on duty. Doctors arrive 'on mission' and their main duty is medical registration: this is for new arrivals and entails no treatment.

One of the distribution NGOs on Chios, Banana & Biryana, is making regular distributions of oil, rice, tea and condiments to some residents in the CCAC and to those residing in Chios town. Offene Arme e.V. (OA) is preparing to commence the distribution of winter clothes and many related items. OA is also providing transport to and from the hospital and covering some emergency medical costs.



NATIONAL

PROCEDURE

The Ministry of Migrations (MoM) web-based system “Alkyoni” continued to have considerable down time over this reporting period. Significant delays continue in registration, interviews, notification of appointments, interviews, decisions, etc.).

At the end of September, we were informed that current appointments scheduled would go ahead but that the Ministry had given a direction that no new appointments were to be made until further notice. It was assumed by our source that this relates to on-going discussions between the EU and Turkey related to the forced return of asylum seekers to Turkey: an unsubstantiated assumption.

Other sources informed that the certain specific nationalities, with high rates of acceptance, will no longer be interviewed. As we have received two different versions of this ‘directive’ we cannot be certain. For Palestinians, this has been the case for some time, however those residents in the Vial CCAC are very distressed about the length of time taken to process their applications. At the time of writing this Report, understandably, they have been demonstrating against recent events in their homeland.

The other nationalities mentioned by one source are Sudanese, Syrians, Afghans, Eritreans and Yemeni. One official of Asylum Services on the mainland however, stated that they could not deny or confirm that these nationalities will not be interviewed, only that it does apply to some of them. Time will tell and A.Ss.I.S.T. will follow up to ascertain to which of these nationalities this may or does apply.



NATIONAL

DETENTION

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of arrests under the alleged offences of facilitation of illegal entry to the country of third country nationals, many if not most of whom travelled to Greece to seek international protection.

Latest news:

** GREECE - SITUATION ON THE ISLANDS REMAINS DIFFICULT**

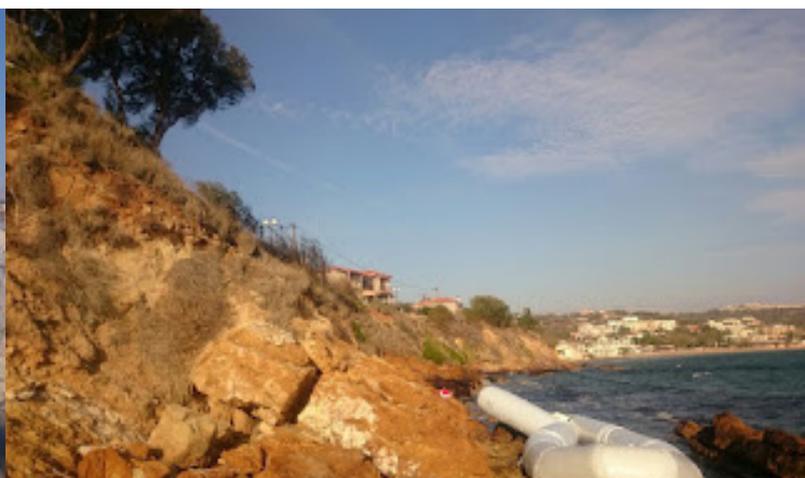
The situation with refugees and migrants in Greece remains difficult as arrivals continue, cramming reception facilities on the islands that have reached their capacity.

The capacity for registration and identification on the islands by the first reception and asylum services is no more than 100-150 persons per day, resulting in a long waiting list of persons to be registered.

Asylum seekers are not allowed to leave the facilities until their registration and identification processes are completed. As a result, hundreds of people are stranded for days on end.

There are currently 16,172 people at the reception and identification centers on the islands, with reports claiming that 3,000 are Palestinians. Despite transfers to the mainland, the number of people staying at these centers on the islands has more than doubled in a month and a half.

The transfer of 160 asylum seekers accommodated at the C.C.A.C. is expected next Wednesday to Kavala and mainland facilities.



NATIONAL

ECONOMY

In late September 2023, the Minister of Migration announced a 'migrant regularization programme' to meet the pressing needs of the labour market. The programme will target "an estimated 300,000 migrants who are undocumented or whose residence permits have expired to help address acute shortages in agriculture, construction and tourism". The 2023 **tourism** season has also been announced as the best season since 2019.

Unemployment, particularly amongst youth, is high yet there are severe labour shortages in certain industries.

The seasonally adjusted **unemployment** rate in Greece was unchanged at 10.9 percent in August 2023, the same as an upwardly revised 10.9% in July and remaining at its lowest level since December 2009. While the **youth unemployment** rate in Greece has decreased from 29.20 percent in April to 22.50 percent in August 2023.

The 'Migrant regularization programme' is aimed at increasing government revenue through employment taxes and social contributions required under labour law. The labour 'black market' is not limited to the migrant population, so the question must be asked: how will small businesses be able to afford to retain and employ more people? The details of this programme are yet unclear.

Inflation rate in Greece rose from 2.8% in June to 3.4% in July 2023. Food, alcohol and tobacco prices increased. July are the latest figures available.

Latest news:

GREECE - ELECTRICITY PRICES SPIKE:

Electricity prices will increase up to 30% in November, as providers in Greece are expected to announce significant increases in the new tariffs for the next month.

The Ministry of Environment and Energy reportedly estimates that consumers will see increases, but not unreasonable ones as the subsidies are still holding down prices and are valid until the end of the year.

NATIONAL

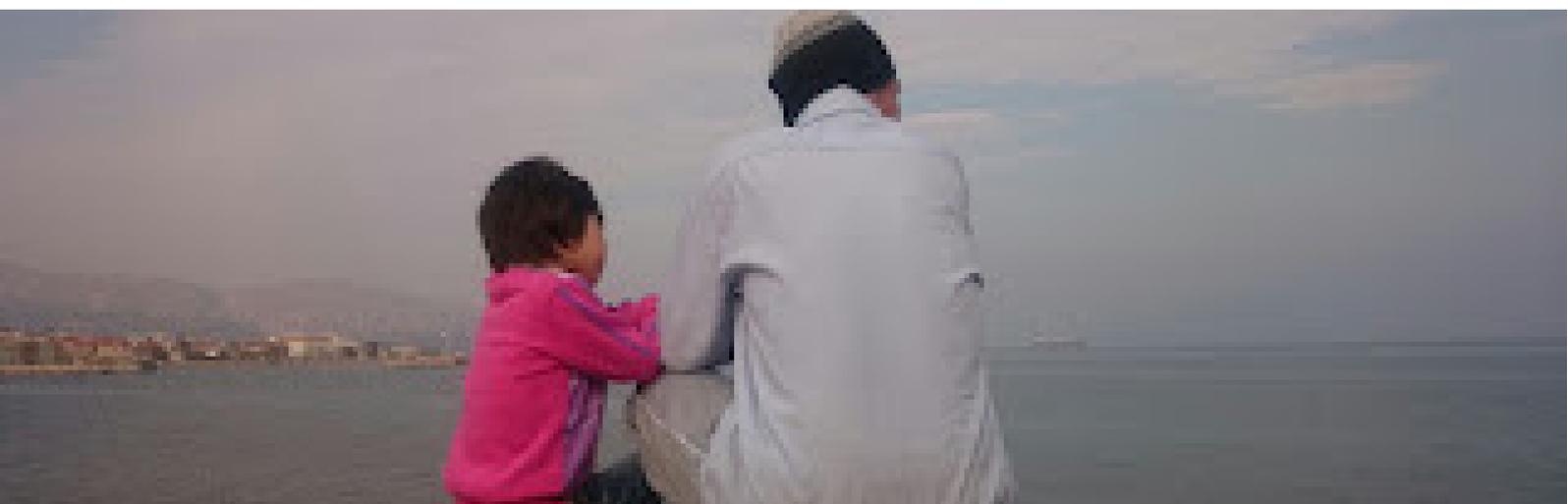
POLITICS

On August 02, the European Court of Human Rights intervened, ordering Greece to provide people on boats being pushed back to Turkey with food, water and medical help. The sudden increase of people arriving by boat from Turkey seeking international protection may be indicative of the reduction in pushbacks, or simply an improvement in weather conditions for crossing, or both.

On 13 September 2023, following the maritime disaster resulting in the deaths of 750 people in Pylos (June 2023), survivors have filed a criminal complaint before the Naval Court of Piraeus against all responsible parties.

In late September, major storms caused severe flooding causing death and widespread damage to properties, crops and infrastructure. Storm 'Daniel' hit the central cities of Larissa and Trikala while a few days later 'Elias' struck between Athens and Patras to the west. Refugees were evicted from subsidized housing to shelter flood victims.

Talks have been initiated with the Turkish President and Ministers by both the European Union officials and the Greek Prime Minister and Ministers. Reports are inconclusive of outcomes. Migration is only one of many topics on the agenda between Turkey and Greece. The 2016 migration pact between the EU and Turkey will be revisited in discussions between Greek and Turkish officials to be held in Thessaloniki on 7th December 2023.



PROGRESS

THE TEAM

Three Greek lawyers

Already experienced in asylum law, two of our current lawyers have worked continuously with our Team since mid-2020; building on their experience in asylum law through the constant changes in legislation, regulations and a plethora of Ministerial decisions and directives. The contacts established over time with authorities in Chios, in Athens and in many parts of Greece often proves of significant value to the welfare of our beneficiaries. Our most senior lawyer has now over 7 years' experience in practising asylum law and has mentored others in this field of law. His commitment to our mission shared by our other lawyers, their extensive experience, the breadth and depth of their knowledge and the networks that they have established with Greek authorities would be exceptionally difficult to replace. Their services continued throughout the current Quarter. Sadly, at present, their services are only secure until end-October 2023 due to funding challenges.

CLIENT SERVICES

A.Ss.I.S.T. enquiry lines have been very busy, however timely progress is prevented or slowed in supporting actions in support of applications from the authorities: neither clients nor lawyers receive information and/or responses required in a timely manner.

A.Ss.I.S.T. 's policy shift to revert to recruiting volunteers in the Client Service Manager positions, while necessary due to funding constraints, has proved performance effective and less time-consuming than previous arrangements. The five volunteer-interns managing our client services to date in 2023 have contributed their knowledge and a set of skills related to their studies in fields relevant to our work.

A.Ss.I.S.T. provides the opportunity to develop their knowledge and hone their skills through the learning experience of working directly with experienced asylum lawyers, our interpreters/translators and our clients to understand well the challenges faced by all actors working with asylum seekers in Greece.

CLIENT SERVICES

Replacing the departing volunteers, A.Ss.I.S.T. welcomed two new volunteer Client Services Managers. Ms. Elysa Slapka and Ms. Elisa Poli, who are already proving to be equally capable and strong Team members. They joined the Team seamlessly taking up their duties after induction and good training by their predecessors.

ELYSA SLAPKA



ELISA POLI



Changing of the Client Services guard...

In August 2023, the Team farewelled three very capable volunteers: two volunteer Client Services Managers: Ms. Loise Laronce and Ms. Coline Bertrand and our volunteer Operations Manager: Ms. Molly Pugh-Jones. All three made exceptional contributions as caring and competent Team members. They continue to offer their services, as may be required, remotely from their respective home bases.

We also welcomed a remote volunteer, Ms. Irem Toker, who joined the Team more recently to provide support in social media, document design and website revisions.

IREM TOKER



VOLUNTEER ON- CALL INTERPRETERS/ TRANSLATORS

SAYED RAFI SADAT



Volunteer On-Call Interpreters/Translators
A.Ss.I.S.T.'s star-studded team of on call interpreters, all of whom are or were asylum seekers themselves; continue to provide services in Amharic, Arabic, Dari/Farsi, French, Kreo, Lingala, Somali, Tigrinya and Urdu. On occasions, we have successfully accessed the services of interpreters of some less frequently requested languages.

From our all-star volunteer interpreters/translators' team, A.Ss.I.S.T. expresses our appreciation for the long-term contribution of Mr. Sayed Rafi Sadat, a volunteer interpreter-translator 'extraordinaire'. Rafi joined the Team on Chios pre-COVID and continues to serve our Farsi and Dari speaking clients remotely. Rafi's presence on the Team is much appreciated by one and all: a true gentleman providing very professional services, he has always been and is a very competent, caring and committed member of our Team.

OPERATIONS

Recruitment of volunteer-interns for Client Services Managers and on-call interpreters/translators is on-going for 2024. A volunteer Operations Manager to provide support to our current volunteer manager and Legal Representative is due to arrive in mid-January and it is planned to recruit a volunteer or pro-bono Operational Efficiency Expert to streamline our service delivery and monitoring performance metrics.

Client Feedback Form

Our Client Feedback form to give clients the opportunity to comment on our services currently receives around 30% return rate. At present, it is only in 6 of the languages common to our clients. The questions require box-ticking, it is mobile friendly and allows space for comment.

A selection of recent comments received are provided below.

"Hello. Since I have had the services you provide, I have been very satisfied with the care provided of A. Ss. I. S. T., the concern, and the interest of my lawyer and the rest of the group in order to help me in my case. These services are very current and necessary, due to the help they provide to the person, restoring hope and faith in the opportunities and possibilities that we as clients have in each particular case." (original text in English)

"I was thinking die to I have reasonable case for seeking an asylum there is nothing that I need till I met with the ASSIST. Thanks to you even if I have enough documents, I could not know to get proper order and shape. From the first time Miss Elysa and lawyer, Mr. Dimitrios, really helped me a lot. I think we will keep in touch because I have second interview. I already recommended about ASSIST to my friends. Thank you very much again." (original text in English)

"One of the best, or the best institutions. They provided me with assistance, and their response was quick, and they work to help refugees, and the translation is excellent." (translated from Arabic)

"You better include financial aid or food." (translated from Lingala)

We can only refer to other organizations that provide these services.

OPERATIONS

Informal client feedback - positive and negative - is received on our WhatsApp enquiry lines and shared with those managing the specific case; as well as through direct contact between lawyers and clients seeking their views. This of course is not demonstrable. We share them within the Team only.

We understand much of the gratitude and positive comments are based on the 'power' differential between service providers and those who need the service. There is no alternate service with which to compare our services except perhaps the experience of the CCAC services... Then there is the obvious cultural norm for most of showing gratitude to those that offer to assist ... and/or those who may be considered useful to one now and later... many motivations.

As in the past, positive comments are often received, and the few negative comments received often, but not always, express their justified frustration in understanding the procedures and sometimes it is based on the client's misunderstanding of what lawyers can and can't do.



SERVICES

LEGAL AID

"Since the procedure is not fair, the rule of law is definitely not guaranteed..."

Challenges in the provision of legal aid to asylum seekers and refugees:

The available means of communications with the Greek administrative services/authorities are often 'closed', the relevant authorities or officers of the government are unreachable. They reply after significant delays, their responses are often inadequate, or they simply never reply at all.

International protection cases are complicated by their very nature: involving people from different, diverse cultural backgrounds and languages. The failure of administrative services to cooperate, their lack of knowledge and understanding of the law or their failure to fulfill their duties render cases extremely difficult to manage effectively and efficiently.

A.Ss.I.S.T.'s legal team endeavors to provide those seeking international protection with accurate information and efficient legal services because the team has a clear view of the responsibility its members assume in operating these cases. On several occasions the team has also "forced" the administrative instruments to apply the law, by either interacting with them persistently until they execute their duties properly or, if that fails, by reporting identified mistakes or bad practices to the hierarchy of each service up to the level of the ministers and the ombudsman. Rising to the challenge of navigating an already complex legal framework is made so much more difficult when facing the additional barriers of non-cooperation from the authorities.



From July to September 2023, over 450 people received free legal aid and many more legal and practical information to assist them in their understanding of the legal procedure and of practices required in the local context. The results of A.Ss.I.S.T.'s legal work can be life changing through appeals and general support through interview preparations and legal consults on a wide range of both asylum and civil matters.

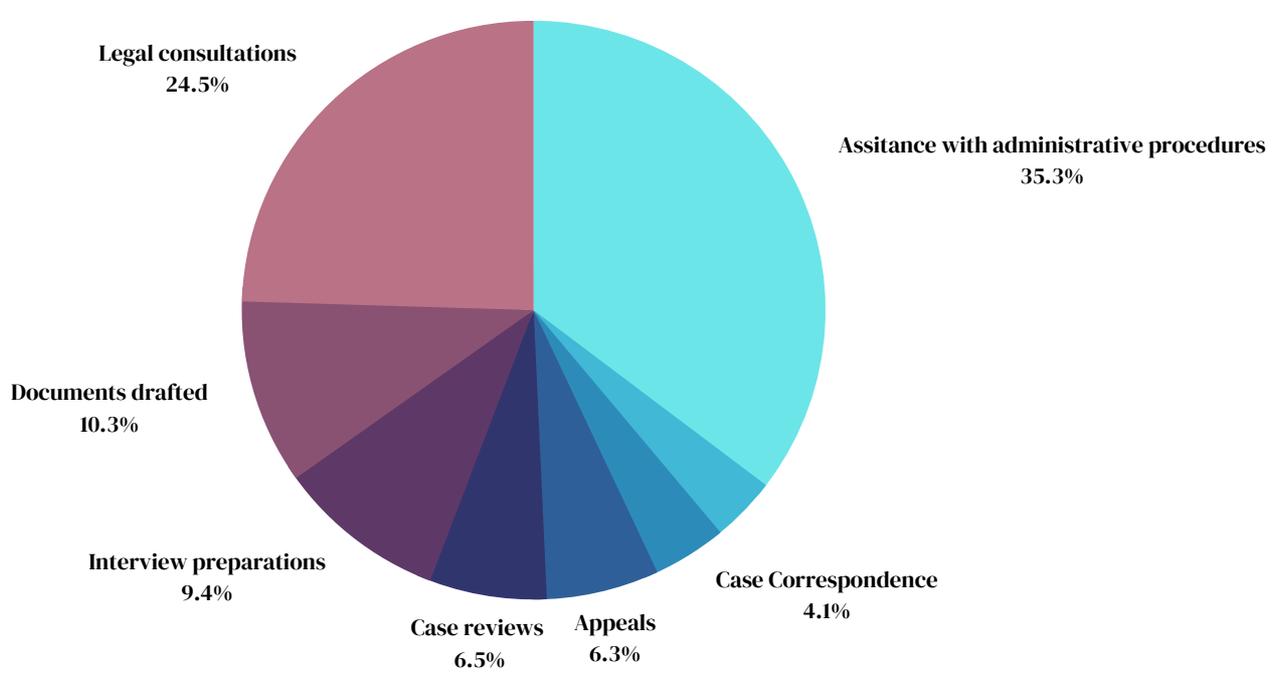
As previously reported, we do not always learn of the outcome of cases as lawyers are only informed if the client chooses to inform them. While A.Ss.I.S.T. can no longer accurately track the outcome of all appeals submitted because the Greek Asylum Service (GAS) now provides decisions directly to applicants only via email. Not all clients, for a variety of reasons, inform our office of the outcome of their appeals.

For some good news, it is the legal victories and good news received for team members that bolsters team morale and gives cause for some celebration.

STATISTICS

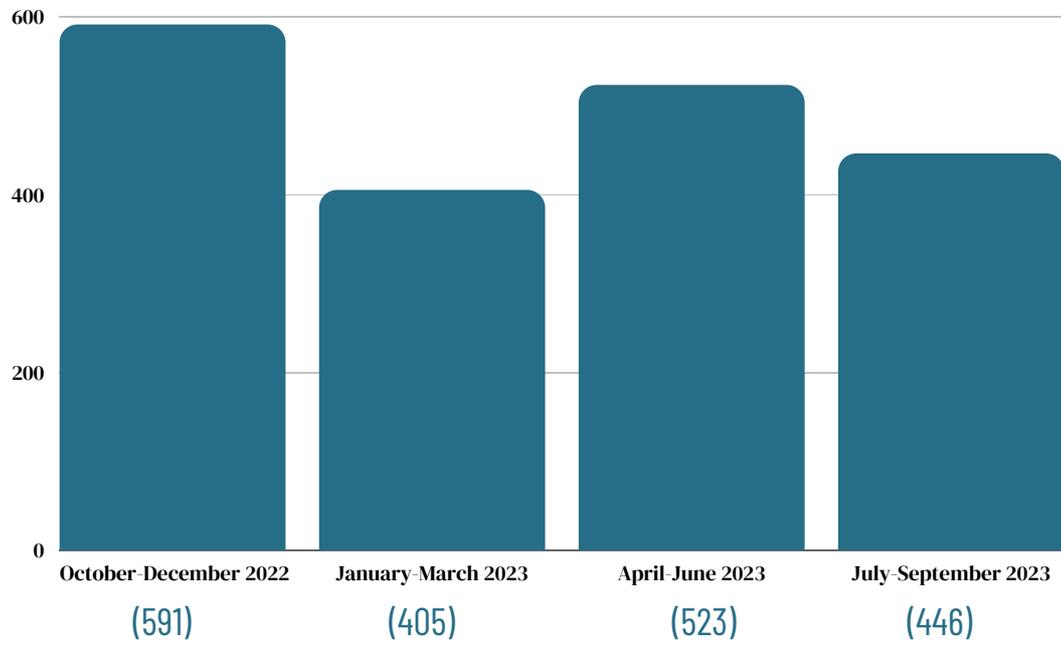
Please note amendments have been made to our database from which our statistics are drawn. This will require further adjustments to accurately reflect annual figures.

SERVICES PROVIDED

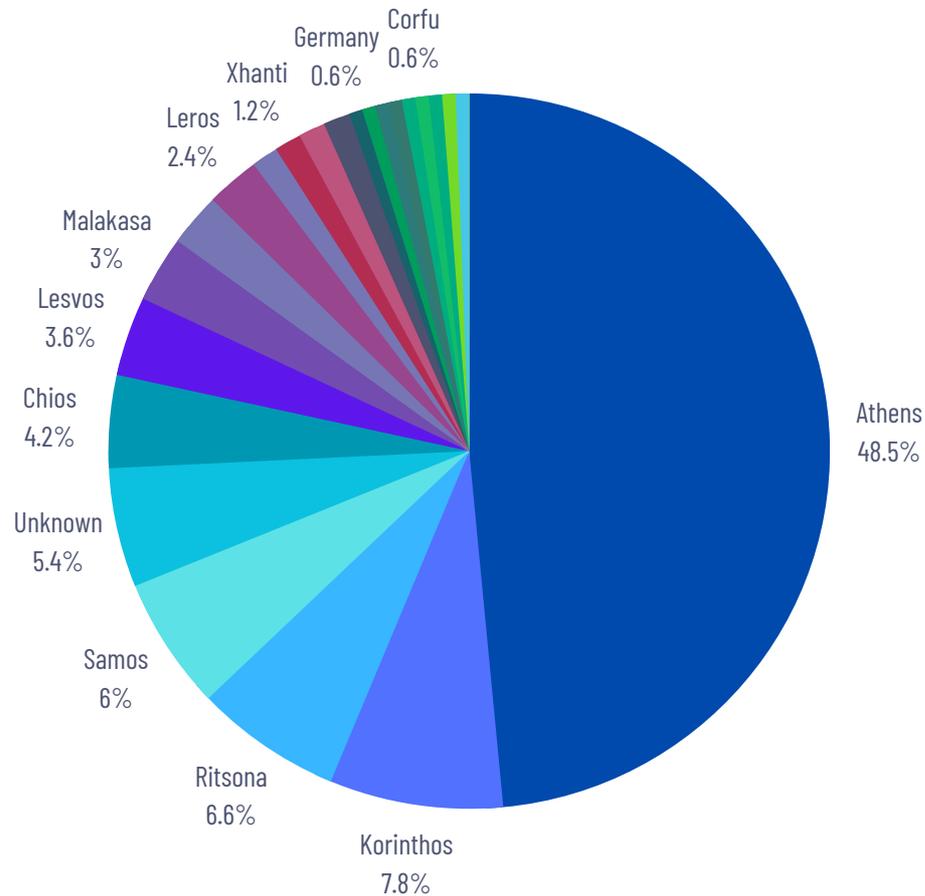


- Registrations: 15
- Case Correspondence: 17
- Appeals: 26
- Case reviews: 27
- Interview Preparations: 39
- Documents drafted: 43
- Legal consultations: 102
- Assistance with administrative procedures: 147

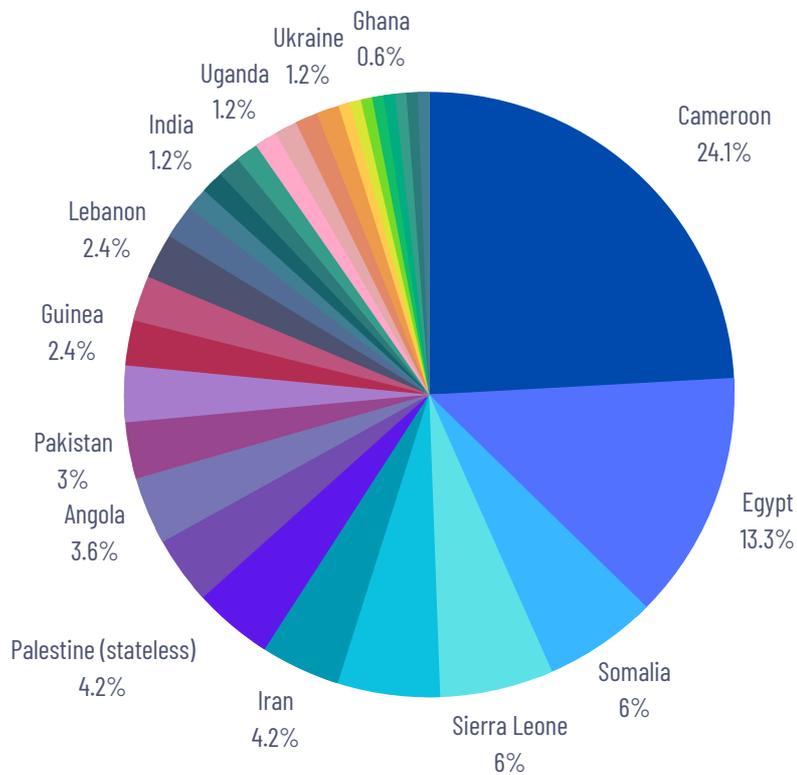
CONSULTATIONS



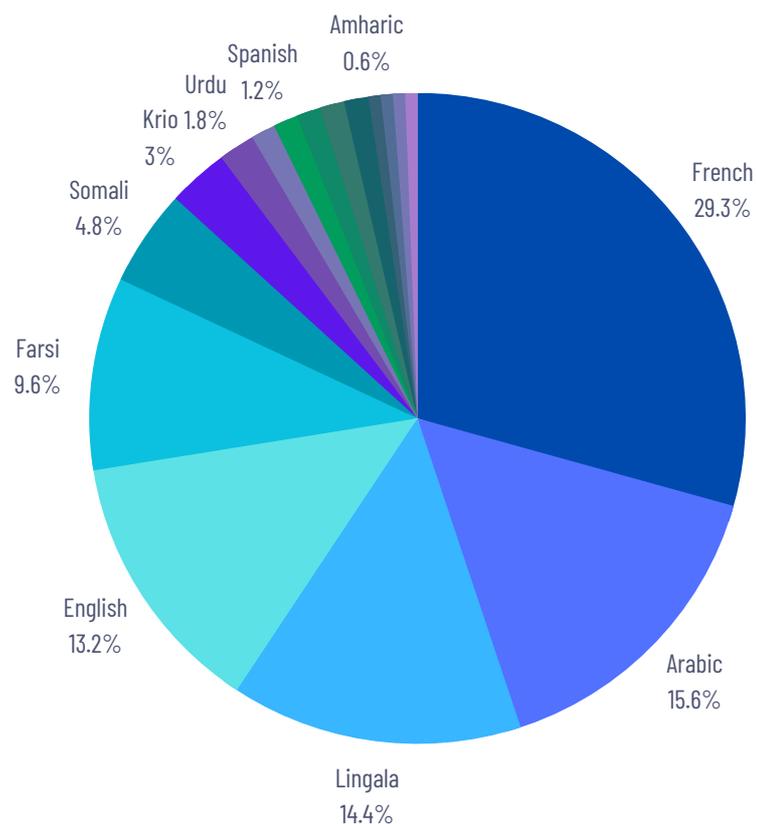
CLIENT LOCATIONS



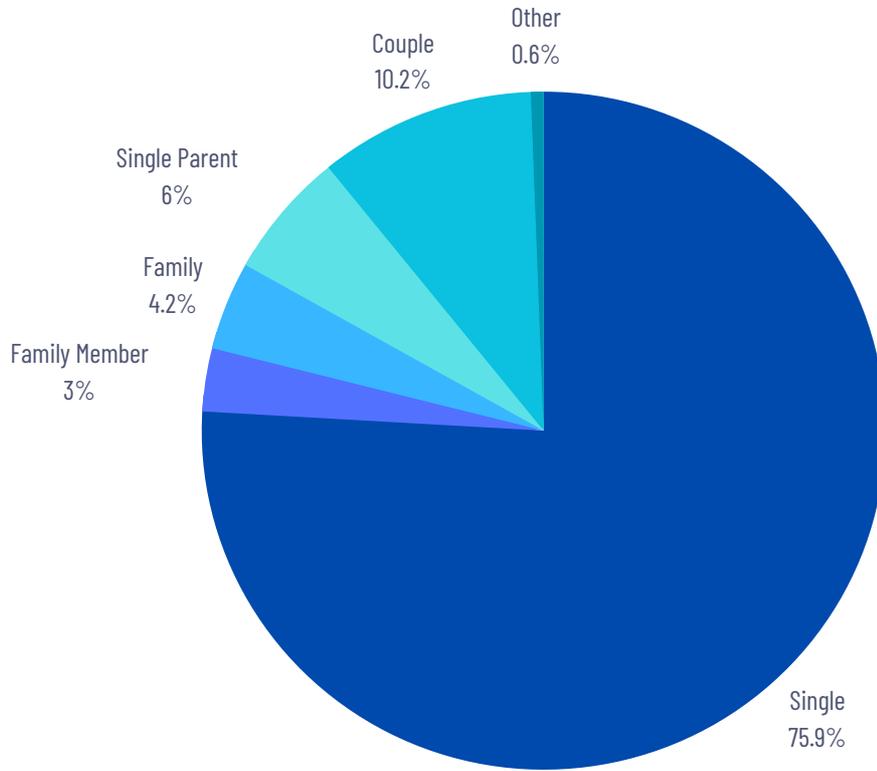
NATIONALITIES



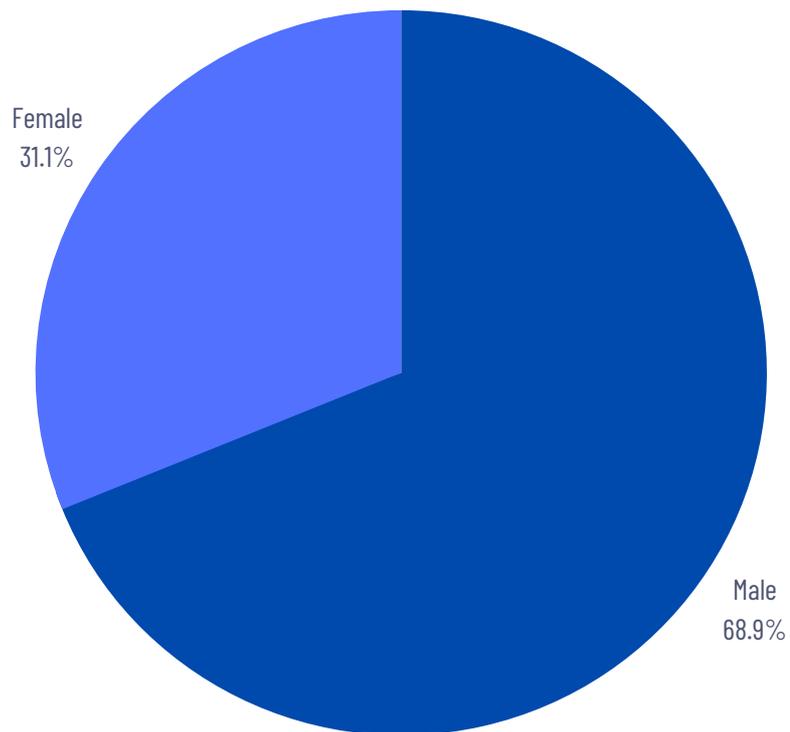
LANGUAGES



FAMILY STATUS



GENDER



REFERRALS

In-coming referrals

A.Ss.I.S.T. received 77 client referrals from diverse agencies and NGOs from both other Islands and the mainland.

Out-going referrals

A.Ss.I.S.T. referred 33 clients to other services via referral forms, the majority were for accommodation, medical and psycho-social support. Many other clients were given helpline contacts and service contacts directly.

CHALLENGES

The challenges are too many to report – they are those faced from the establishment of A.Ss.I.S.T. to the present with many more added through changes in law and procedures, in circumstance and in the levels of competence met in the diverse agencies of government.

Fundraising has always been a challenge. In this Quarter, more so than usual, due to the need to allocate reserve funds to cover all forward commitments, every effort is being made to raise additional funds. This has, however, forced A.Ss.I.S.T. Partners to consider a temporary suspension of services.



LOOKING FORWARD

Should it be decided to suspend temporarily our services, A.Ss.I.S.T. will put every effort into resurfacing in 2024 as soon as circumstance and funding permits. Our Legal Representative will be visiting family from mid-November 2023 to early January 2024 but will continue to work remotely. Any downtime in service provision will be dedicated to reviewing and improving our recording and operational systems to improve efficiency in client services as well as to simplify internal communications. In the best possible case, no downtime and this work will nonetheless go forward but probably at a slower pace. We are awaiting responses from some grant applications. Our current Client Services Managers are in the process of up-dating and improving our current Q&A database.

A.Ss.I.S.T.'s Athens-based lawyer continues to follow the AMERA online certificate course on trauma-related legal practice.

Three Team members will attend a training on the Basic Principles of Gender-Based Violence conducted by Action for Women in Athens on Friday, 13th October 2023.

EKKA – HUMAN TRAFFICKING workshop mentioned in our last Report has been postponed. Dates to be confirmed.

All going well with fund-raising and in the recruitment of volunteers with the requisite skills, A.Ss.I.S.T. plans to undertake an Operational Efficiency Audit in 2024.

THANK YOU

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO READ THIS REPORT.

Donations are now more than ever critical to the continuation of our services.

So, if you want to donate, or become a regular donor, here is the link to our Global Giving project:

<https://www.globalgiving.org/donate/84198/a-ss-i-s-t/>

or if you know people who you think may be interested in supporting our work, please share.

