

## Case Study

The results of ASsIST's legal work can be life changing. With ASsIST's support, a young woman has access to essential welfare services, safety and refuge through long-term protection, but more importantly a life free from fear and filled with hope,

### **Supporting survivors of Gender-Based Violence**

Meet "Tulin " (pseudonym), who managed to escape the dual threat of female genital mutilation and forced marriage to an older man in her home community. Her father, an advocate of archaic practices like genital mutilation, subjected all young female family members to unspeakable abuse and coerced them into life-altering acts. When Tulin voiced her resistance to succumbing to surgery, she was badly beaten and threatened with death. Tulin was to be forced to undergo circumcision surgery and into an unwanted marriage, a union orchestrated with a powerful, rich, older man, a strong advocate for female 'circumcision' and well-known for his mistreatment of women.

Thanks to a clever plan devised by a neighbour and with the help of an older sister, Tulin managed to escape and then flee the country.

Tulin 's resistance to succumbing to this mutilation procedure and her courage in escaping to avoid this and a forced marriage bear witness to her courage while emphasising the lack of choice open to young women in certain traditional communities. The long dangerous journey to reach Greece, during which she suffered further abuse and physical violence at the hands of human traffickers is further testimony to her strength and resilience.

Upon arrival in Greece, Tulin was restricted to one of the Closed Controlled Access Centres for many months as her application for international protection proceeded in faltering steps and was finally rejected. She was informed that she would have to leave the CCAC, leave the country or face arrest and deportation.

The looming threat of forced return to her home country cast a dark shadow over her future. The possibility of being coerced into this horrific procedure and forced marriage by her father or being abandoned by her family or killed is the stark reality that she would face.

On the advice of one of the women in the CCAC, Tulin contacted the ASsIST Helpline. Informed of her options by an ASsIST lawyer, Tulin decided to accept the services of our lawyer in the submission of a second or subsequent application. Once a subsequent application procedures are initiated, the process takes several more months, but once accepted for assessment, Tulin was once again recognised as a bona *vide* application, her rights to food and accommodation in the CCAC were reinstated and she was no longer at risk of arrest and deportation. However, this did mean several more months in the poor living conditions in the CCAC or 'camp'. Prepared for interview by the ASsIST lawyer, informed of other services available to her and referred to a local NGO operating near the CCAC, Tulin's experience in the 'camp' became less onerous as her application proceeded within the system.

In May 2025, Tulin received a positive decision. This crucial decision marks a critical juncture for a safer future and hope for freedom from abuse. The status of recognised refugee provides her with greater certainty and hope for a life free from threats of subjugation and violence.

Tulin's challenges do not end with this decision. ASsIST has referred her to 'Action for Women', an Athens-based NGO that supports refugee women with psycho-social support and, *"who need support and care to find homes, jobs, access to services and make new connections and friendships with other women from both the Greek and refugee communities"*.

This case highlights the critical importance of the approach taken by both legal counsel and all those who engage with survivors of gender-based violence.

Many women from diverse cultural backgrounds, often struggle not only to describe their experiences but also to acknowledge them. Fear of authorities, prevailing emotions of shame, fear, and guilt can create significant barriers to disclosure, making it essential to provide legal, psychological, and social support. It is highly likely that, prior to her meeting with the ASsIST representatives and lawyer, Tulin had not revealed during her initial application the critical facts that ultimately led to her being recognized as a refugee. She may not have felt secure enough to share such sensitive information.

This case underscores the critical importance of supporting survivors of gender-based violence and ensuring that no individual should endure persecution or forced adherence to harmful traditions. Tulin's courage in facing these challenges epitomizes the resilience and strength of survivors, urging a collective response to safeguard the fundamental rights and dignity of every individual.

(Note: Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the individual involved.)