



January - March 2023

QUARTERLY REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Context Update

1. Chios Island
Proposed New CCAC
2. Procedures
3. Access to Services
Health
4. Covid-19
Mainland
5. National
 - Politics
 - Economy

06

Progress

6. The Team
8. New Athens Office
Operations
9. Code of Conduct

10

Services

10. Legal Aid
15. Referrals
Challenges

16

New Status, New Statutes

18

Looking Forward

CONTEXT UPDATE

CHIOS ISLAND

From January to end-March there were over 200 new arrivals registered for international protection and over 170 asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection (BIPs) were transferred to the mainland or departed Chios Island. The number of residents in Vial Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCAC), officially renaming the previous Reception Identification Centres (RICs), remained under 400 persons over the period. The unusually high percentage of children at the end of 2022 and the beginning of this quarter decreased significantly. Somalis remain the majority nationality represented with minor variations in the number of Palestinians, Sierra Leoneans and Yemeni each representing around 10% of the population.

The Manager of Vial CCAC has resigned, leaving end-April. The deputy Manager assumes this role pending a new appointment.



PROPOSED NEW CCAC

The courts extended the use of Vial premises by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA) to end 2023. While the court hearing addressing charges against 18 defendants (of whom some are local politicians) related to the January 2022 incident (arrival of machinery on Chios for Tholos area works blocked by locals) scheduled for 11 March 2024



PROCEDURES

UNHCR reported that “the average time between registration and decision notification was at the end of 2022 estimated at 1,5 months”. Many current clients, particularly those transferred to the mainland, have been waiting more than 3 or 4 months. The Reception and Identification Services (RIS) reported that asylum seekers registered as Somalis or Ethiopians were changing their nationality to Ethiopian, Yemeni or stateless. Unaccompanied minors (UAM) continue to receive a high percentage of positive decisions; few negative decisions post-first interview.

A lack of interpreters assigned to the Chios CCAC resulted in first instance interviews being suspended for several weeks in March 2023. Lack of interpreter services available also creates a major challenge for non-English speakers. Chios Banks and the Citizen Services Bureau refuse to serve them. These services are essential to meet criteria for employment and for the witnessing and issuing of documents required to access other benefits.

Permissions for residents to leave the CCAC, except during specific hours and under specific conditions, remained in force until 27 February 2023. To our knowledge, this continues or has been extended as several clients have been able to come to our office to meet with lawyers.

Unregistered persons seeking international protection arriving on Chios from the mainland, though few, continue to be arrested by police and placed in administrative detention. At least one person was released and duly registered at Vial CACC.

Equal Rights Beyond Borders; a legal aid NGO with an office in Chios and recently registered with MoMA; applied to operate within the CCAC and was recently refused permission.

Metadrassi, a Greek NGO, received a grant to employ Job Counsellor positions to assist asylum seekers and BIPs to prepare for and seek employment. Their role is to provide job-search assistance to adult individuals including support with CV drafting, individual job-search coaching and job interview preparation. In mid-March 2023, a part-time Job Counsellor commenced duties in the Vial CCAC.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) presence in Vial ceased operations on 31 December 2022. Two NGOs providing services inside the Vial CCAC, Movement on the Ground (MotG) and Salvamento Marítimo Humanitario (Humanitarian Maritime Rescue) (SMH) were required to leave the CCAC as there are not registered with the MoMA. The former left on 27 January and the latter on 31 January 2023. With the departure of MotG recreational and English language classes for adults, WASH/shelter maintenance and other community engagement activities ceased. UNHCR reports that the RIS is launching efforts to resume English language classes to women from own resources. SMH, a Spanish NGO, has been running a clinic staffed by volunteer doctors, nurses and dentists for many years. The consequent reduction in services further reduces the services available inside the CCAC.

HEALTH

The cessation of the SMH operations has reduced access to medical and dental care, access to medicines and the joint SMH-Offene Arme e.V. project providing transport to hospital appointments has also ceased. On February 6, five nurses were assigned by the National Organization of Public Health (EODY) to the health clinic inside Vial CCAC. Previously, this Clinic had only one doctor, for many months in 2022 had no doctor, and when there was a doctor, they were only doing medical checks for the procedures. The EODY clinic is open from 9 a.m. to midday, Monday to Friday, by appointment only through the Receptions services. A new container has been installed in the Vial CCAC for an IOM clinic. It is reported that it will include microbiology lab and a radiologist office. The launch of this operation is still pending. It is not yet known if or when other agencies or contractors will take over other services.



COVID-19

A new Joint Ministerial Decision was issued to regulate COVID-19 restriction in all CCACs covering the period from 30 January to 13 February 2024. New arrivals are subject to testing upon entry to the CCAC and are subject to quarantine (5 days) inside the CCAC, if tested positive. Only 2 children are reported to have tested positive. The quarantine facility at Lefkonía is closed.

MAINLAND

The asylum service of Alimos requests Powers Of Attorney (POA) with authentications from the authorities only now. Previously lawyers' signatures were being accepted. This means a delay in receipt of POAs as clients must now go to the Citizen Services Bureau to have their signatures witnessed and the POA stamped. This could put at risk appeals with short deadlines.

Registration appointments remain few and difficult for clients to obtain appointments at Malakasi, the CCAC closest to Athens.

Mobile Info Team have published a report on conditions in the Detention Centres, it is available at <https://www.mobileinfoteam.org/detention>, or via QR code.



NATIONAL

ECONOMY

The Greek government made the following announcement. "With the new increase, which starts to apply from April 01, 2023, the minimum wage is set at 780 euros. Thus 585,000 workers will have increased salaries at the end of the month. At the same time, the new increase in the minimum wage drags down the unemployment benefit and other benefits." It is unclear what is meant by this increase 'drags down ... benefits'. This is an increase from 713 Euros in 2022. Greece Unemployment Rate dropped to 10.80% in Jan 2023, from the previously reported figure of 12.40% in December 2022. And in February 2023 rose again to 11.4%. (Source: ceicdat.com). Youth Unemployment Rate in Greece increased to 29.70 percent in February from 28.10 percent in January of 2023. (Source: [EUROSTAT](#)).

POLITICS

The increase in the minimum wage is in good time for the national elections to be held on Sunday, 21 May, 2023 although it may not win votes from small business. Demonstrations were held all over Greece condemning the current Government for the railway disaster near Larissa that occurred 28 February 2023. Many signs read: "We will not forgive you". A.Ss.I.S.T. plans to continue to provide our services, adapt and adjust to the needs of our clients for as long as we can maintain our funding-base to secure the services of Greek lawyers and as long as our services are required.



PROGRESS

THE TEAM

In mid-January 2023, the Team welcomed three new volunteers. One short-term volunteer Legal Advisor (VLA) and one short-term volunteer with legal qualifications on mixed duties and a long-term volunteer Client Services & Operations Manager (CSOM) based in Chios whose assignment will finish end-June 2023. Volunteer Legal Advisors received training from our Chios Greek lawyers. Only one completed the training satisfactorily enough to independently provide interview preparation for first-instance clients, while the other VLAs and the CSOM were training in the provision of e-services to clients: registration for appointments, ID renewals, changes of contact details etc. The e-services of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA) now obligatory access to the Asylum Services can be found at applications.migration.gov.gr/en/ypiresies-asylou/



EMMA BRENNER

In the provision of services, volunteer Client Services Managers will receive training to support clients needing assistance in completing applications and emails to the Asylum Services via migration.gov.gr - this relieves the lawyers of these often time-consuming tasks.



Volunteering with A.Ss.I.S.T. since mid-January 2023, Emma has been A.Ss.I.S.T. 's Client Services and Office Manager in Chios. Emma's professional, client-focused approach to service delivery and her natural empathy and willingness to understand the difficult circumstances and very diverse backgrounds of the many vulnerable people that she continues to serve are much appreciated within the team and by many of our clients.

YONIEL GEBRELIASSIE

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 more rarely required languages, generally sub-Saharan African languages.



Yoniël has been one of the many stars on the A.Ss.I.S.T. on-call interpreter team. He is the longest serving interpreter as he has interpreted Amharic-English and Tigrinya-English from the very first information sessions and legal consultations delivered by our Team. An excellent interpreter and team member, Yoniël has long since left Chios Island but continues to offer his services remotely and as needed giving of his time in an otherwise busy new life to A.Ss.I.S.T. Yoniël is the 'without whom not' for many of his compatriots, who would not have understood the information needed to proceed with their applications for international protection. Thank you, Yoniël!

DIMITRIOS PAVILIDIS

Our current Chios lawyers continued to provide their services throughout the current Quarter. In March 2023, A.Ss.I.S.T. contracted the services of a third Greek lawyer who is based in Athens for the period of 6 March to 5 June 2023. The successful applicant volunteered with A.Ss.I.S.T. for three months pre-COVID then already a qualified lawyer.



A.Ss.I.S.T. welcomed Dimitrios back to the Team. Dimitrios volunteered as a lawyer in 2020, in March 2023 Dimitrios rejoined A.Ss.I.S.T. as our Athens-based lawyer. With his professional experience and dedication to A.Ss.I.S.T.'s work, he is a very valued member of A.Ss.I.S.T.'s legal team.

NEW ATHENS OFFICE

The signing of the lease with A.Ss.I.S.T.'s shared office with Refugee Legal Support (RLS) was delayed to beginning February 2023. Costs were kept to a minimum as furniture (desks, chairs, small cabinets) stored at our shared office with Safe Place Greece is now in use. The office is on the ground floor of Leof. Alexandras 14, Ground floor, Athens 10682.

Two of the short-term volunteers were working out of the Athens office from mid-February to mid-March. By end-March, only the Athens-based lawyer is working in Athens. With many strong candidates recently interviewed for both CSOM positions; Athens and Chios, two new volunteer Client Services Managers will arrive in May.

OPERATIONS

After trialling AirTable for our Client Records, it was decided to develop a new Excel format, as AirTable offers little additional facilities and is therefore not cost-effective. January to March 2023 Client Records have been transferred to the new more consolidated and comprehensive Excel program and, after much struggle, the Statistics for the last Quarter (without the contacts figures) have been corrected, tested and are at last available.

A Client Services Charter and Handbook have been developed. Protocols for text and voice messages introduced as the review of some of the enquiry content was not consistent and sometimes inappropriate. The Charter will be available on the A.Ss.I.S.T. website, the Handbook is for internal use, training of new volunteers.

A new, more user/mobile friendly feedback form begins distribution in April 2023. A brief trial showed more responses being received than previously. It is forwarded to clients after first instance interviews or when the legal procedure for which they are being assisted is deemed completed. If there is an increased response rate, the information will be used to meet their concerns. Positive and negative comments received unsolicited are shared with the people (manager, lawyer and interpreter) responsible for operating the case. As in the past, positive comments are often received, and the few negative comments received often, but not always, reflect a lack of understanding of the lawyer's role or powers.

CODE OF CONDUCT

The Code of Conduct has been revised to incorporate some of the information previously provided in the Induction Manual, which will include some additional practical information for volunteers from outside of Greece. The Safeguarding and the Conflict and Grievance policies were reviewed by a Partner with corporate experience some additional text was added. A new counsellor is being sought to support volunteers as the previous counsellor who was available by phone only is no longer available. Chios-based volunteers will still be limited to phone access only. In the interim, a trained therapist, also a Partner of A.Ss.I.S.T., will be available as the current contact.

The review of our Induction Manual is a work in progress. The Code of Conduct, Complaints Management Policy and Safeguarding Policy revised and approved to conform with our new status as a non-profit private company registered in Greece (see below). We are proceeding with the review and revision of all our policies, protocols and guidelines so that the terminology used conforms with our new status.



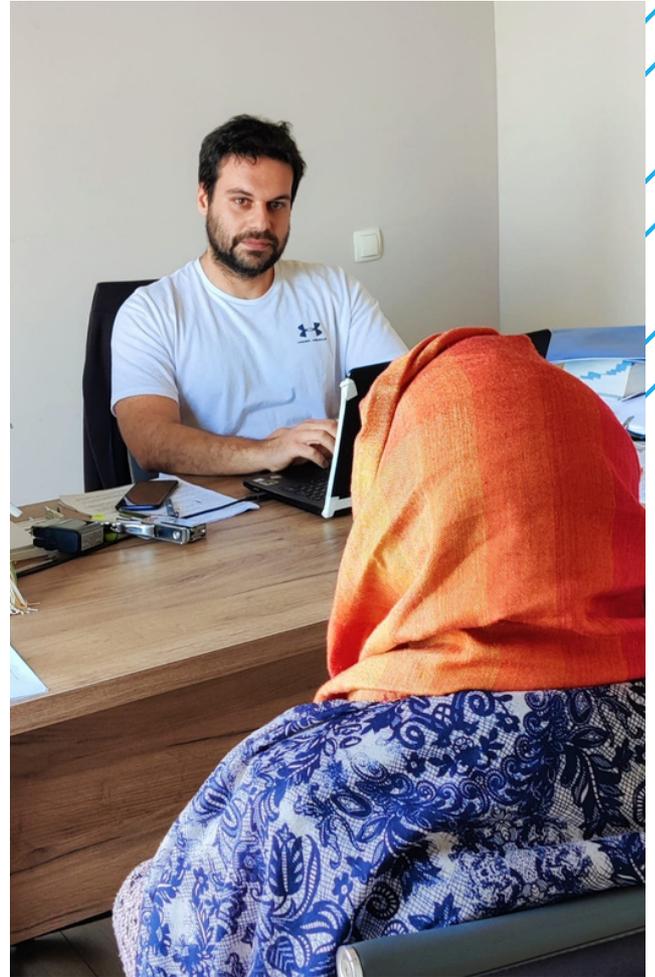
SERVICES

LEGAL AID

Over 240 people received free legal aid and many more legal and practical information to assist them 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.

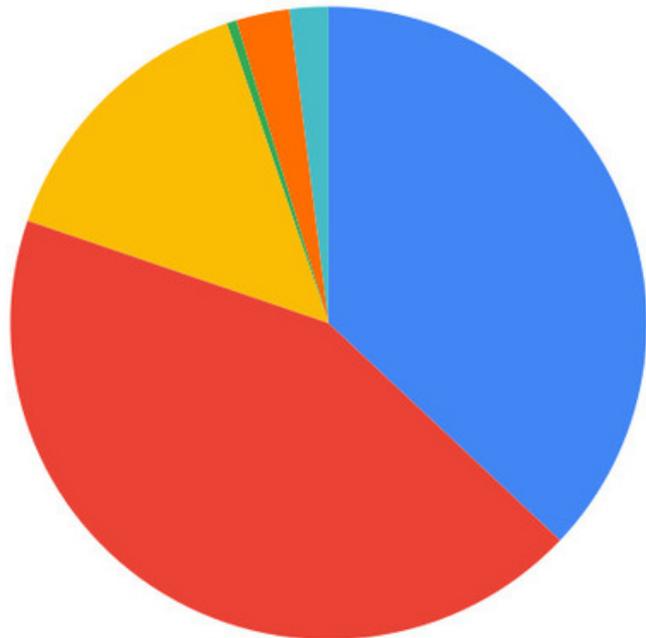
As present, few clients can afford to visit our office in Chios as the only transport available is taxis (Euros 10/each way to town). We are therefore unable to assist them with bank accounts and with document signatures at the Citizen Services Office. In Athens, clients are requesting to meet the lawyer in person and visit our office.

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.



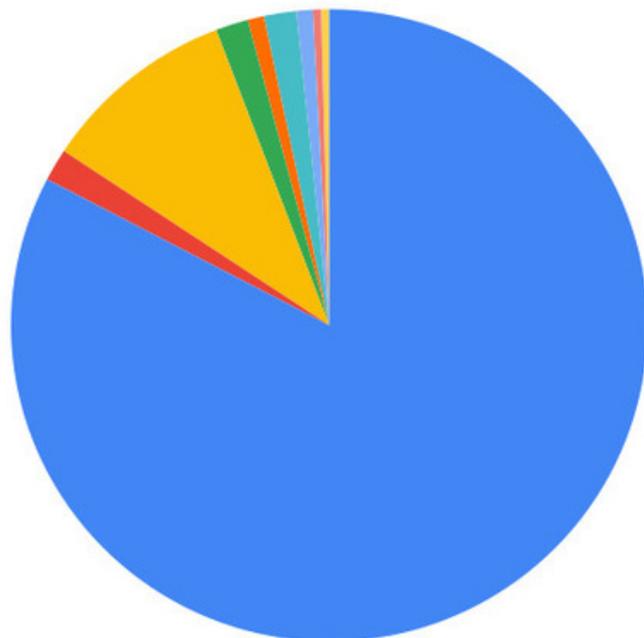
Statistics 01-03/2023: TYPE OF SERVICE

- Legal consultation : 150 (37,0%)
- Assistance with administrative procedures : 175 (43,2%)
- Interview preparation : 59 (14,6%)
- Representation in administration : 2 (0,5%)
- Other : 11 (2,7%)
- Submission of appeal : 8 (2,0%)



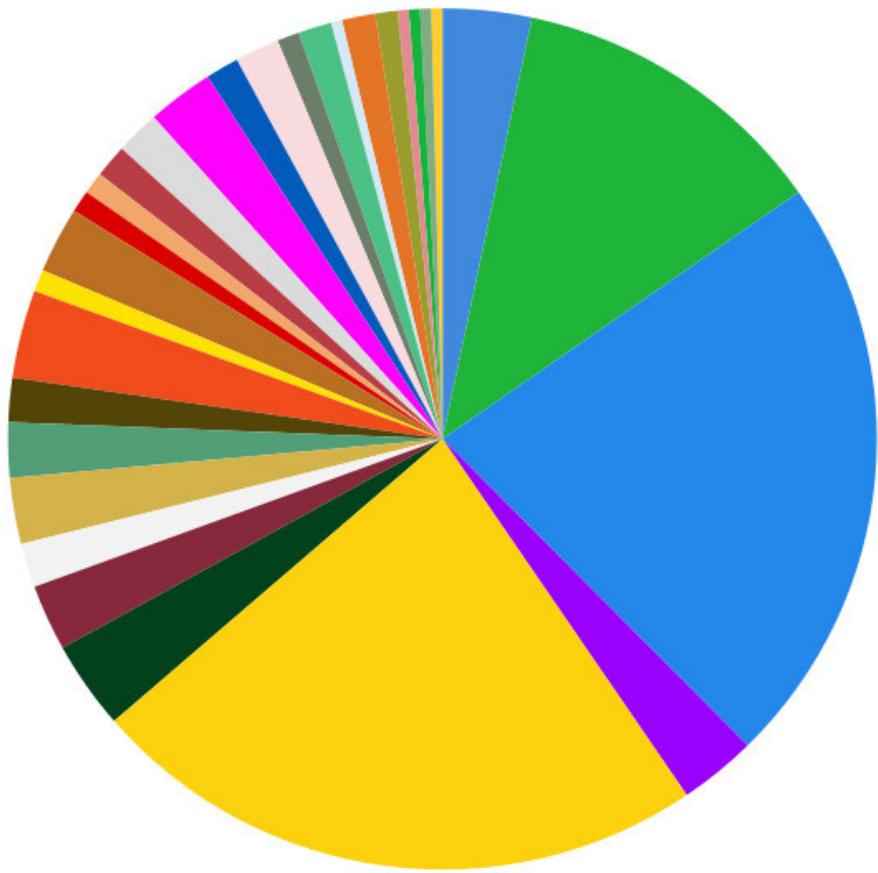
Statistics 01-03/2023: CLIENT LOCATION

- Athens : 200 (82,6%)
- Thessaloniki : 4 (1,7%)
- Chios : 24 (9,9%)
- Corinth : 4 (1,7%)
- Lesbos : 2 (0,8%)
- Kos : 4 (1,7%)
- Karditsa : 2 (0,8%)
- Rhodos : 1 (0,4%)
- Nea Kavala : 1 (0,4%)



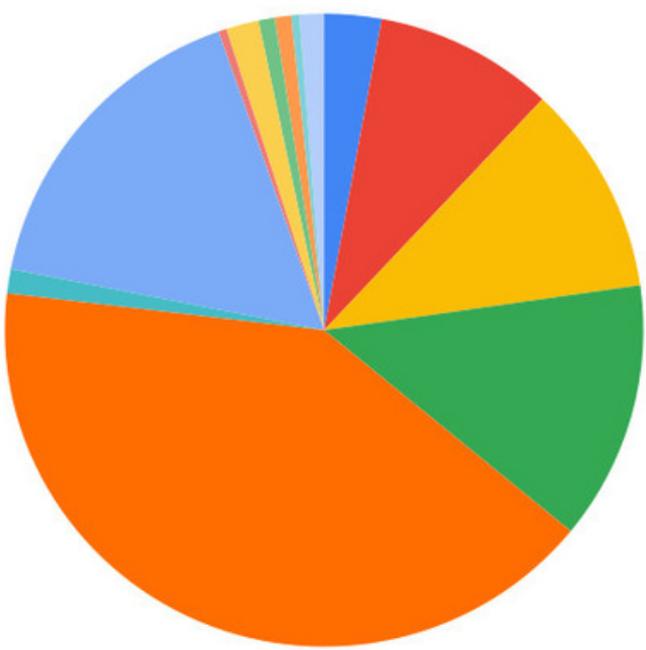
Statistics 01-03/2023: NATIONALITY

- Somalia : 8 (3,3%)
- Sierra Leone : 29 (12,0%)
- DRC : 54 (22,3%)
- Palestine : 7 (2,9%)
- Cameroon : 56 (23,1%)
- Pakistan : 8 (3,3%)
- Togo : 6 (2,5%)
- Afghanistan : 4 (1,7%)
- Egypt : 6 (2,5%)
- Iraq : 5 (2,1%)
- Ghana : 4 (1,7%)
- Guinea : 8 (3,3%)
- Ecuador : 2 (0,8%)
- Uganda : 6 (2,5%)
- Iran : 2 (0,8%)
- Ivory Coast : 2 (0,8%)
- Bangladesh : 3 (1,2%)
- Yemen : 4 (1,7%)
- Stateless : 6 (2,5%)
- Ukraine : 2 (0,8%)
- Syria : 4 (1,7%)
- Ethiopia : 2 (0,8%)
- Lebanon : 2 (0,8%)
- Djibouti : 1 (0,4%)
- Rep. of Congo : 2 (0,8%)
- South Africa : 2 (0,8%)
- Algeria : 1 (0,4%)
- Mali : 1 (0,4%)
- Sudan : 1 (0,4%)
- Eritrea : 1 (0,4%)



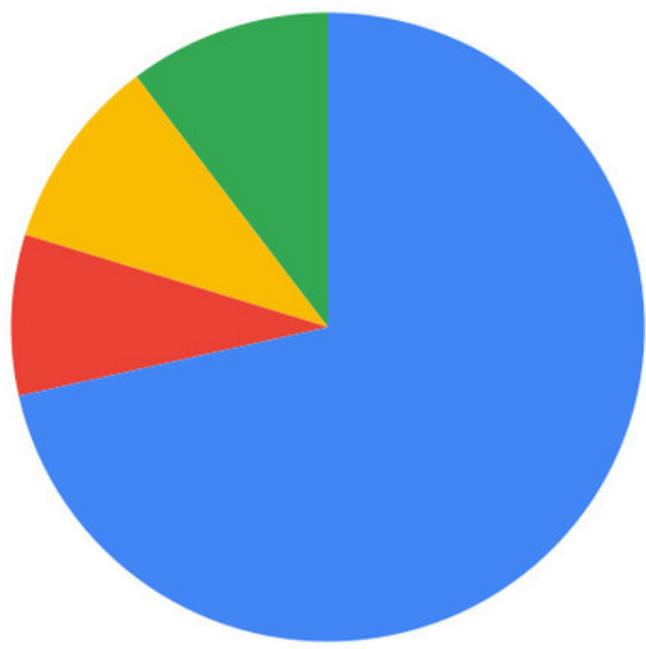
Statistics 01-03/2023: LANGUAGE

- Somali : 7 (2,9%)
- Krio : 22 (9,1%)
- Lingala : 26 (10,7%)
- Arabic : 32 (13,2%)
- French : 99 (40,9%)
- Urdu : 3 (1,2%)
- English : 40 (16,5%)
- Dari : 1 (0,4%)
- Farsi : 4 (1,7%)
- Twi : 2 (0,8%)
- Ukrainian : 2 (0,8%)
- Amharic : 1 (0,4%)
- Greek : 3 (1,2%)



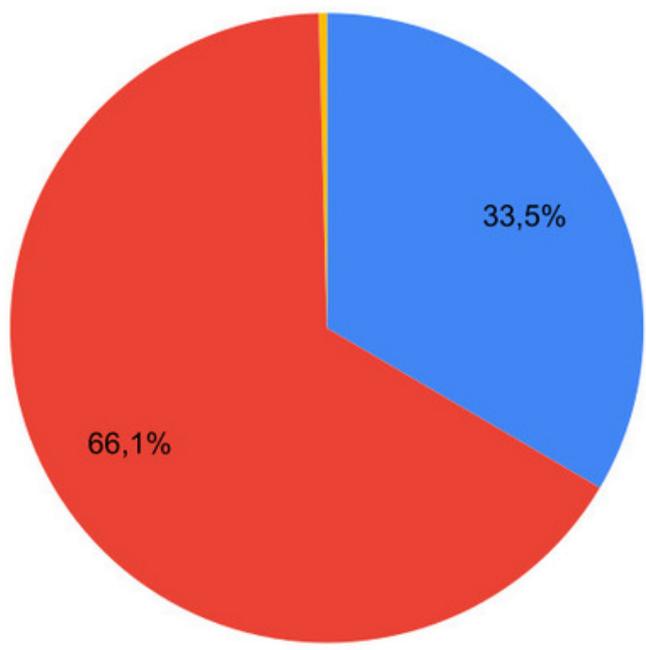
Statistics 01-03/2023: FAMILY STATUS

- Single : 173 (71,5%)
- Family member : 20 (8,3%)
- Family : 24 (9,9%)
- Single parent : 25 (10,3%)



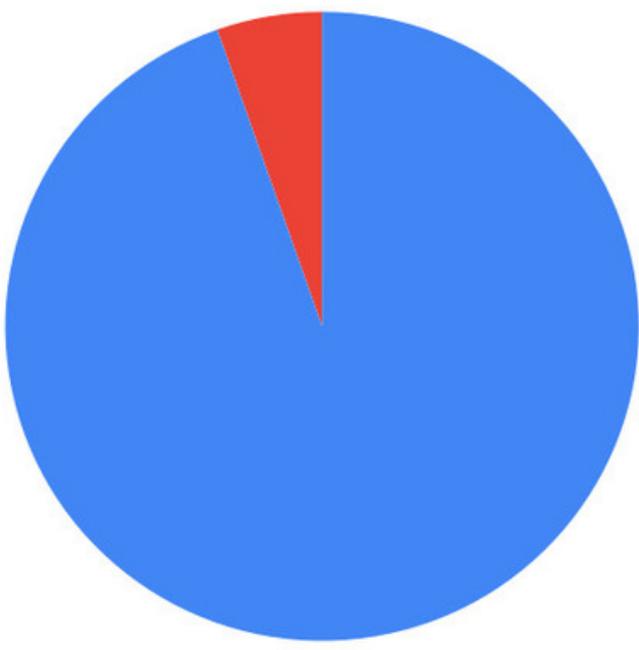
Statistics 01-03/2023: GENDER

- Female : 81
- Male : 160
- Other : 1 (0,4%)



Statistics 01-03/2023: AGE GROUP

- Adult : 229 (94,6%)
- Minor : 13 (5,4%)



REFERRALS

In-coming referrals

A.Ss.I.S.T. received 53 client referrals from diverse agencies and NGOs from both other Islands and the mainland.

Out-going referrals

A.Ss.I.S.T. referred 22 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

By the end of March 2023, with short-term volunteers leaving earlier than foreseen, the Team is reduced significantly with only one volunteer available to cover both offices. The current CSOM, Emma Brenner, is doing an excellent job covering both enquiry lines, while the Legal Representative and the Athens-based lawyer assume some office administrative roles normally assigned to the CSOM positions. Several excellent candidates for CSOM Athens position were interviewed end-March, a second round of interviews will be held in early April.

A.Ss.I.S.T. requires a minimum commitment of 3 months for all volunteer positions. Volunteer interns (Erasmus scholars) have shown themselves to be reliable and committed to learning and applying themselves to the tasks. This contributes to their university requirements. Volunteering is a two-way process: knowledge, skills and competencies offered and acquired by both parties: A.Ss.I.S.T. and the volunteers.



NEW STATUS, NEW STATUTES

Under our new Statutes, A.Ss.I.S.T. 2023 has three Partners dedicated and committed to our Mission. Together the Partners have agreed to take on more active roles than the previous Administrative Board in support for the Partner/Legal Representative and the broader Team in Greece. Providing support in recruitment, in policy and other documents review and development, they are more available and meet as a partnership regularly to discuss and advise on issues as they arise.

ASsIST PARTNERS

Introducing our new governing body: our Partners. Welcome Rakel Seser!



RAKEL SEZER

Born, educated in, and resident of, Istanbul; as an undergraduate, Rakel studied biology and her post graduate studies were in environmental sciences. She boasts 20+ years' experience in the pharmaceutical industry, in manufacturing, clinical research and quality management

In 2015-16, with the influx of people seeking refuge to Turkey and to Greece, she volunteered with the Chios Eastern Shore Response Team (CESRT - now Offene Arme e.V.). There she bore witness to the many violations of the rights of asylum seekers. Her book titled 'Refugee' records her impressions, insights, and testimonies she gathered while working at a refugee camp in Chios highlighting refugees' own stories: what they went through before arriving in Chios and then the inhumane conditions of their life in the camps in Chios

ASsIST PARTNERS



SHEILA (SANDY) CROSS

Following a career in international development working for many years in South East Asia and in local government in remote communities in Australia, Sheila has been a resident of Chios since 2017. As Partner and Legal Representative of A.Ss.I.S.T., she has enjoyed the privilege of collaborating with the Teams of many like-minded people, volunteers and professional associates, who have dedicated their efforts to fulfilling the mission and objectives of A.Ss.I.S.T.



MARY WENKER

A trained special education teacher and therapist, involved for many years in the defense of refugee populations in Switzerland, her country of residence. Since 2016, she has also been involved in Greece (Chios, then Athens) through the association Choosehumanity which she created. She is the author of several books on the issue of asylum, and runs numerous training courses for teachers and educators, so that they can better understand the issues of exile. Mary is co-founder and current Partner of A.Ss.I.S.T.



LOOKING FORWARD

THERAPEUTIC LEGAL ASSISTANCE MODEL

A.Ss.I.S.T.'s Athens-based lawyer and Legal Representative will commence an on-line certificate entitled "Therapeutic Legal Assistance Model" on 26 April 2023.

A training for all A.Ss.I.S.T. volunteers with the Boat Refugee Foundation (BRF) in Athens is proposed for this coming quarter: April to June 2023. This is an introductory training to Well-Being and Mental Health and PsychoSocial Support. This training aims to introduce to the participants elements of the concepts of wellbeing, mental health and MHPSS, as well as ways of identification, referral guidelines and good practices.

THANK YOU
for your continued support

