



April - June 2023

**QUARTERLY
REPORT**

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CONTEXT UPDATE:

CHIOS ISLAND

From 03 April to 02 July 2023 there were over 299 new arrivals registered for international protection and over 352 asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection (BIPs) were transferred to the mainland or departed Chios Island of their own accord.

The number of residents in the Vial Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) remained under 450 persons over the period. The percentage of men in the CCAC varied considerably over the period, the number of women remained fairly stable and the number of children decreased over time until the recent arrival of 155 people in June 2023.

Palestinians became the majority in 'nationality' followed by Somalis then Sierra Leonians represented with minor variations in their number.



PROPOSED NEW CCAC

To our knowledge, there is no progress related to the new CCAC. It is rumoured that this will not go ahead. Statements related to this could also have been election 'sweeteners'.

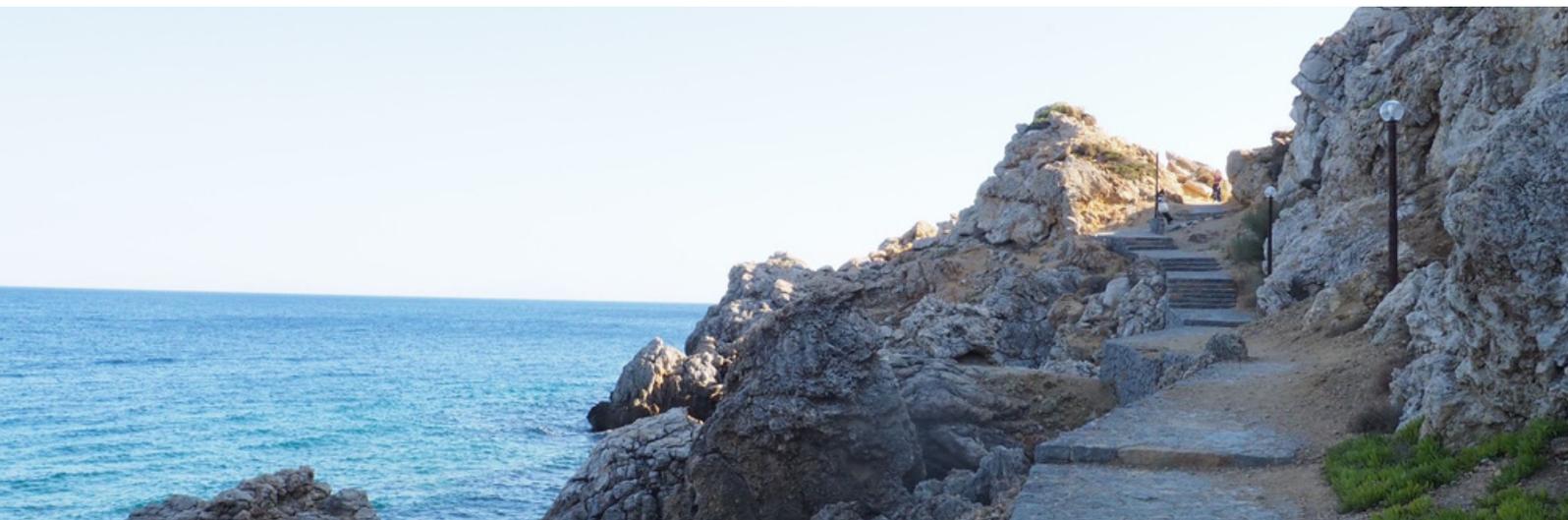
PROCEDURES

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. Arabic/Greek, Arabic/French and Krio/English interpreter services were available as of June 2023. See below for the impact nationally of the cessation of Asylum Services computer services.

Permissions for residents to leave the CCAC, except during specific hours and under specific conditions, continues or appears to have been extended as several clients have been able to come to our office to meet with lawyers.

DETENTION

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. All three known to A.Ss.I.S.T. spent a short period (few days) in custody and were then transferred to the CCAC for registration.



ACCESS TO SERVICES

HEALTH

Salvamento Marítimo Humanitario (Humanitarian Maritime Rescue) (SMH), a Spanish NGO, ran a clinic staffed by volunteer doctors, nurses and dentists for many years. The gap in services caused by the forced cessation of the SMH operations in January 2023 continued to be felt throughout this Quarter. Delays in medical and dental appointments, essential medical tests and many specific medications unavailable for long periods, high cost of medicines and appointments through private providers due to delays at the Chios Hospital. Irregular availability of transport to access these services. The EODY clinic is open from 9 a.m. to midday, Monday to Friday, by appointment only through the reception services. This clinic does not provide the same range of services or the medications that were previously available through SMH.

COVID-19

The Joint Ministerial Decision to regulate COVID-19 testing and restriction in all CCACs is still in force. New arrivals are subject to testing upon entry to the CCAC and are subject to quarantine (5 days) inside the CCAC, if tested positive.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

In May, UNHCR held a 'Job Fair' in Chios town, succeeding in introducing some applicants to employers, principally in the agricultural sector. A.Ss.I.S.T. also informed clients of the availability of employment on Chios specifically for the mastic harvest. Employment terms and conditions offered were generous, but to our knowledge there were no takers.

OTHER NEWS

The world's attention was captured, if only for a moment, by the heavy loss of life on June 9, 2023, when a boat near Greece requiring assistance sank. While mainstream media coverage has ceased, persons and organisations actively engaged in human rights and justice issues more widely continue to follow up on the investigations into this maritime disaster. It is to be remembered too that the continued loss of life at sea is never far from the minds of those who hear almost daily from the asylum seekers horrendous accounts of their treatment during failed attempts to reach the Aegean Islands continues.

In June, Solidarity Chios held an evening of food and activities as an 'Anti-Racist' Festival (see photograph below).



NATIONAL

ECONOMY

Averaging 9.3% in 2022 inflation declined to 6.3% by Q1-2023. Price pressures are expected to further moderate this year thanks to easing energy prices. Consumer prices are forecast to increase by 4.2% and 2.4% in 2023 and 2024 respectively (May 15, 2023). Greece Unemployment Rate increased to 11.20% in April 2023, from the previously reported figure of 11.10% in Mar 2023. Greece Unemployment Since 1998 to the present the unemployment had an average rate of 12.30%. While the youth unemployment rate in Greece increased to 27.40 percent in April from 24.20 percent in March of 2023.

POLITICS

The national elections were held on Sunday, 21 May, 2023. The New Democracy party retained government, winning the right to form government in alliance and not in its own right. A further election was held on 25th June where the right of the New Democracy Party to form government in its own right was the outcome.

Pending the formal announcement of the Ministers, we received information that there will be a new Minister of Migration, one Mr. Dimitris Kairidis, whose reputation is one of being very hardline.

PROCEDURE

With the Ministry of Migration's (MoM) computer systems being out of service for a period of several weeks, more precisely since 9th May and still not fully operational, this impacted on the international protection applications progressing (delays in registration, interviews, notification of appointments, interviews, decisions, etc.). This also resulted in delays for recognized refugees being able to renew their resident permits, travel documents and other services required to be able to settle into the community. Hence A.Ss.I.S.T. lawyers and Client Services Managers experienced increased difficulties to maintain the full range of services to our clients and to respond to the increase in the number of enquiries and requests received via our two WhatsApp 'help' lines. The relaunch of computer services on 7th June enabled resumption of registrations, including medical registrations, asylum application registrations, including of subsequent asylum applications, as well as notification of decisions and residence permits, and other administrative requirements.

From 5th May to the present, the Ministry of Migrations (MoM) web-based system "Alkyoni" has either not been operating at all or with some occasional and ad hoc responses to clients and their lawyers. Operations ceased for a system upgrade and at the end June was still not operating satisfactorily and, in some places, it seems that it is not operating at all.

The digitisation of so many of the Asylum Services already created additional difficulties for asylum seekers and refugees and was already yet another barrier to the timely progress of applications. Most particularly some of the most vulnerable and those with no internet access or computer skills are affected. The extended downtime of the MoM database, hence the lack of digital services, has created further difficulties and delays for both asylum seekers, refugees and is compounding delays for those endeavouring to provide support and legal aid.



PROCEDURE

Without the system up and running,

1. Those wishing to make a claim for international protection cannot seek an appointment to register. Without such an appointment or unregistered, their status remains that of 'illegal immigrant' and they are subject to arrest and detention. Applicants, we have been informed, may present themselves at Malakasa without appointments from end-June into July 2023.
2. Where interviews continue to be held, and this appears to be very ad hoc and depends on the respective Asylum Service Offices. Case Operators cannot upload the transcription of interviews to the system. Until this is done, no further progress in the application can be made.
3. Those seeking to make a subsequent application cannot seek the appointment required to progress the application.
4. Applicants receiving negative decisions have strict deadlines to appeal against the decision.
5. Applicants already under appeal deadlines have received mixed reactions from the authorities: some allowed to sign their Appeals, some not.
6. A.Ss.I.S.T. lawyers have submitted memoranda in support of appeals but they have not always received acknowledgements.
7. There has been a mixed response from different Asylum Services Offices as to the acceptance of late appeals even though delay is due to system failure.

Some Asylum Offices, for example, Vial CCAC on Chios, have continued to do some interviews but with the arrival of Ethiopian applicants this month and no Amharic interpreter available, interviews are being delayed.

As a result, while A.Ss.I.S.T. enquiry lines have been very busy, progress made in supporting action in support of applications is prevented: neither clients nor lawyers receive information and/or responses required.

PROGRESS

THE TEAM

In June 2023, A.Ss.I.S.T. welcomed three new volunteers: two Client Services & Office Managers and one Operations Manager. Our current lawyers continued to provide their services throughout the current Quarter.

The end-June 2023, the Team farewelled Emma Brenner, Client Services and Office Manager, based in Chios, and who, for two months, carried the burden of both Client Services roles – Chios and Athens. Emma rose to the challenge and her contribution over five months of service is much appreciated by all Team members. Thank you and well done, Emma.

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.

At the end of June, one of our Founders and current Partner, Mary Wenker, visited both Athens and Chios Offices. She attended a MHPSS training with other team members at the Boat for Refugees Foundation (refer Training above) and visited Chios and Athens Offices. She will work with the Operations Manager to recruit new volunteers/interns for induction and handover in August.

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NEW VOLUNTEERS

COLINE:



Coline joins us from Lyon, France, where she is currently completing a degree in International Law. She has taken the role of Client Services Manager for three months over the summer.

LÖISE:



Löise also joins us from France, and is finishing a Master's degree in International Relations. She is also taking the Client Services Manager role, and herself and Coline will both visit our offices in Athens and Chios.

NEW VOLUNTEERS

MOLLY:



Molly is from the UK, and joins us as Operations Manager between June-August. She is finishing a Master's degree in Global Health and Development, and brings experience in the charity sector. In this new volunteer role, she will support us with activities including fundraising, social media and recruitment.

TWO OFFICES, ONE TEAM:

Our Chios Office is serviced by the Legal Representative and one Client Services Manager with two local Greek lawyers providing their services as required.

Our Athens Office is serviced by one Greek lawyer and one Client Services Manager with the presence of clients and interpreters on an irregular basis.

Both services and operations are running impressively smoothly. All three volunteers joined the Team seamlessly taking up their duties after induction and good training by the incumbent Client Services Manager who left at the end of June 2023.

With Molly's help, we have successfully recruited a number of new interpreters to join the team. In addition, we expect to be joined by two new volunteers at the end of the summer, who will provide support into 2024.



TRAINING

BOAT REFUGEE FOUNDATION:

In June, four of our volunteers and one of our partners attended a training session hosted by the Boat Refugee Foundation. The topic of the training was mental health and psychosocial support for asylum seekers and refugees. All of our volunteers thoroughly enjoyed the training, with feedback that it was particularly helpful for both learning how to better engage with vulnerable clients, but also for developing a better understanding of the available referral pathways.

We are fortunate to have collaborated with other partners to deliver additional training for our team over the coming months, including a training on gender-based violence with Action for Women.

NETWORKING

With Molly joining in June, we have had additional capacity as a team to meet and engage with partners. For example, she was able to visit Action for Women's Pomegranate Project in Athens. This was a great opportunity to see their work in action, and meet other colleagues in the sector.

In addition, Molly has met with valued LGBT+ partners at Positive Voice and Emantes. And, as it was 'Pride Month', team members attended various events and celebrations.

On World Refugee Day, she was also able to visit Victoria Community Centre, where numerous partners host activities ranging from food provision, children's services and employment advice.

Lastly, Molly has also supported in expanding A.Ss.I.S.T's network, making new contacts at organisations including the Greek Forum of Migrants.



SERVICES

LEGAL AID

Over 240 people received free legal aid and many more received 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 related civil matters.

In the last week of June, A.Ss.I.S.T. learned that one of our lawyers has won four appeals (two from families: one from Afghanistan and one from Sierra Leone; two single males: one from Iraq and one from Sierra Leone) and one subsequent application for a single woman, GBV survivor, from West Africa. The outcome of these cases is life changing results for 11 people. 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.

Therefore, 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, one of A.Ss.I.S.T.'s long-term interpreters, who continues to work remotely with the Team, received refugee status in Germany. It is the legal victories and good news received for team members that bolsters team morale and gives cause for some celebration.

OPERATIONS

Client Feedback Form – new as of April 2023:

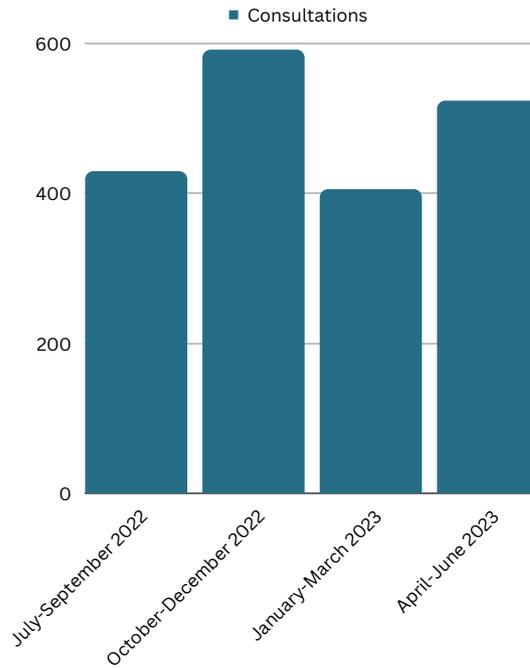
A new, more user/mobile friendly feedback form began distribution in April 2023. A brief trial showed more responses being received than previously. It is forwarded to clients after first instance interviews or when the legal procedure for which they are being assisted is deemed completed. Positive and 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.

Social Media:

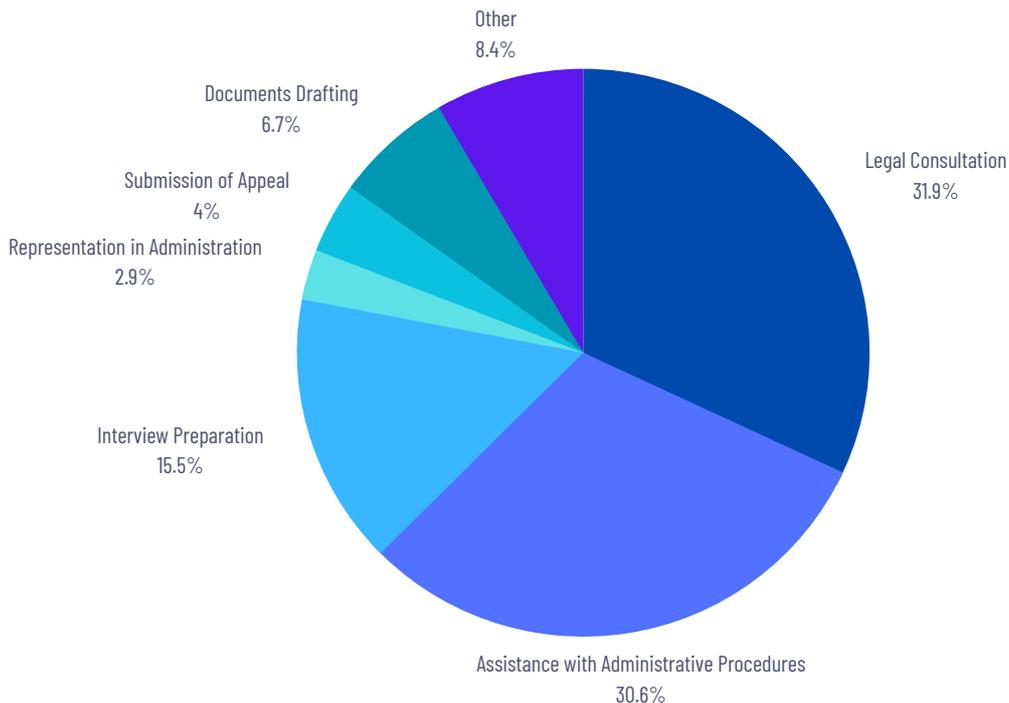
Our Operations Manager volunteer, Molly, has supported our social media output over the summer. This has been especially important for the recruitment of new volunteers, and building our network, with many new followers and increased engagement across all platforms.



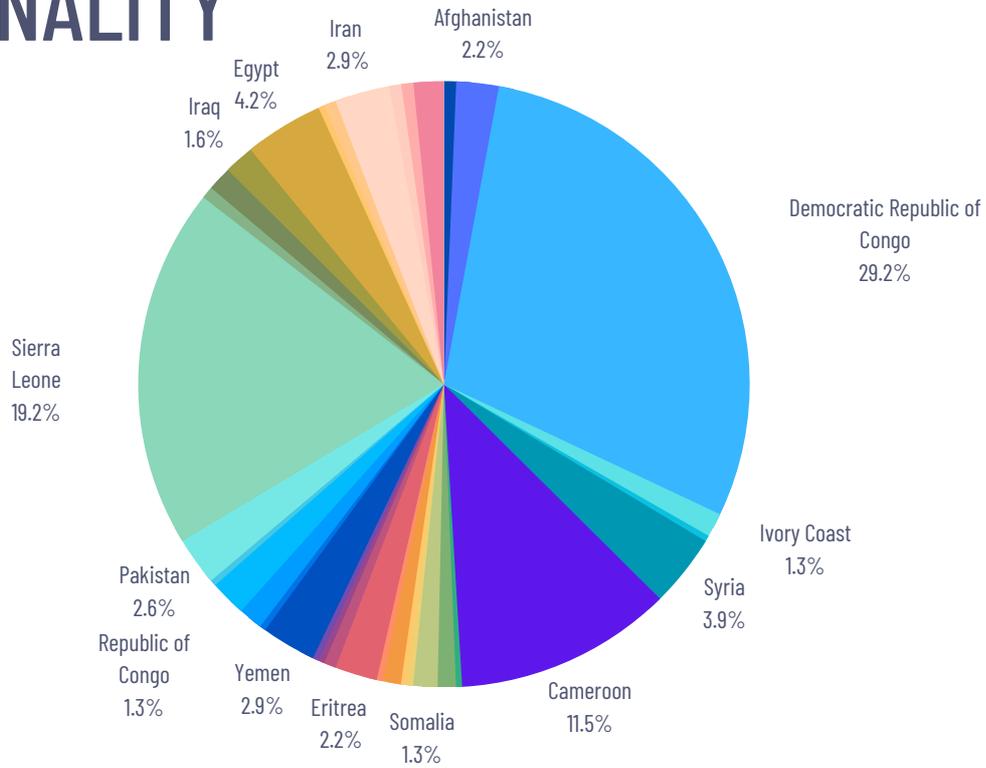
ANNUAL SERVICE PROVISION



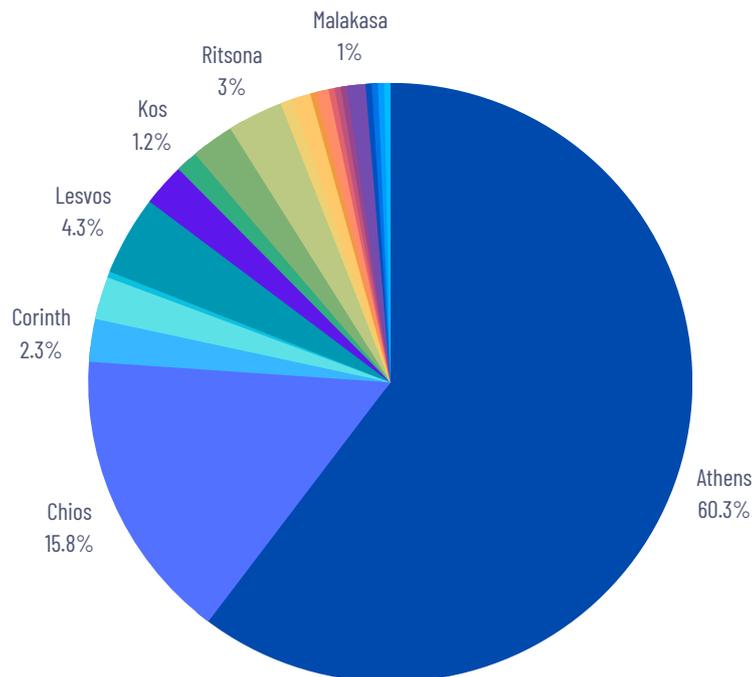
Q2 SERVICES PROVIDED: 523



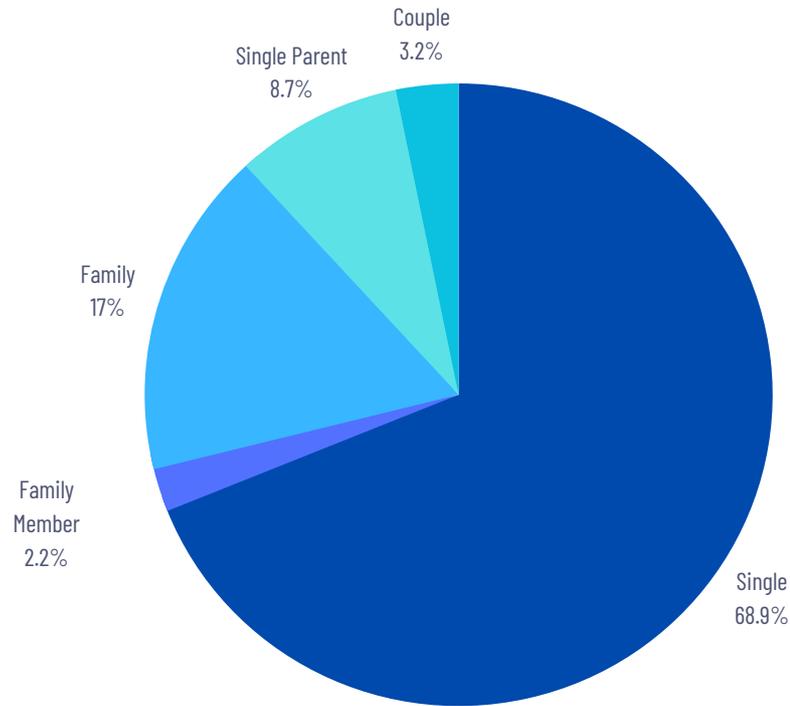
NATIONALITY



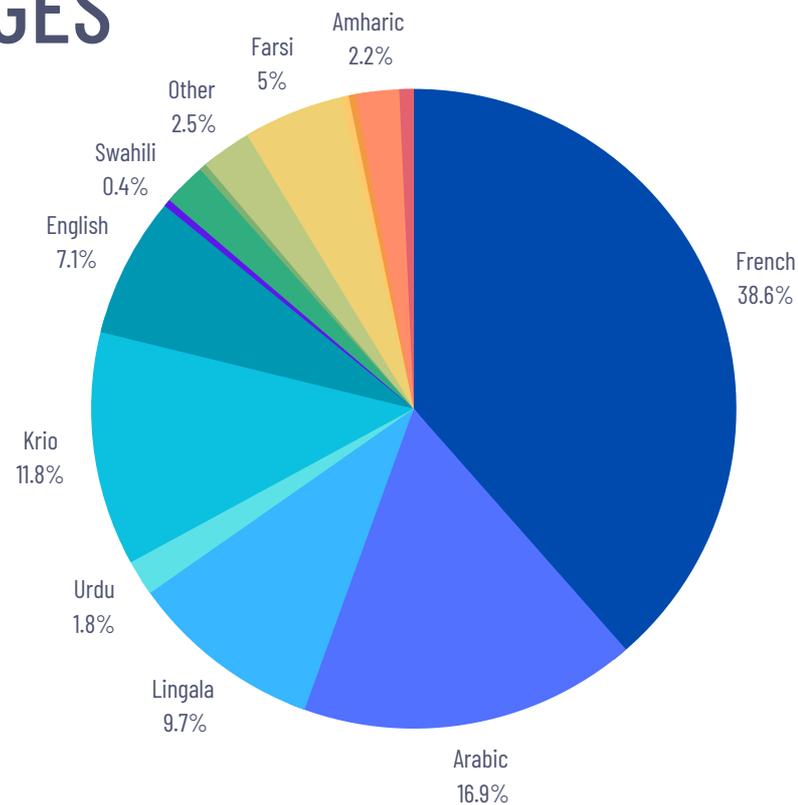
CLIENT LOCATION



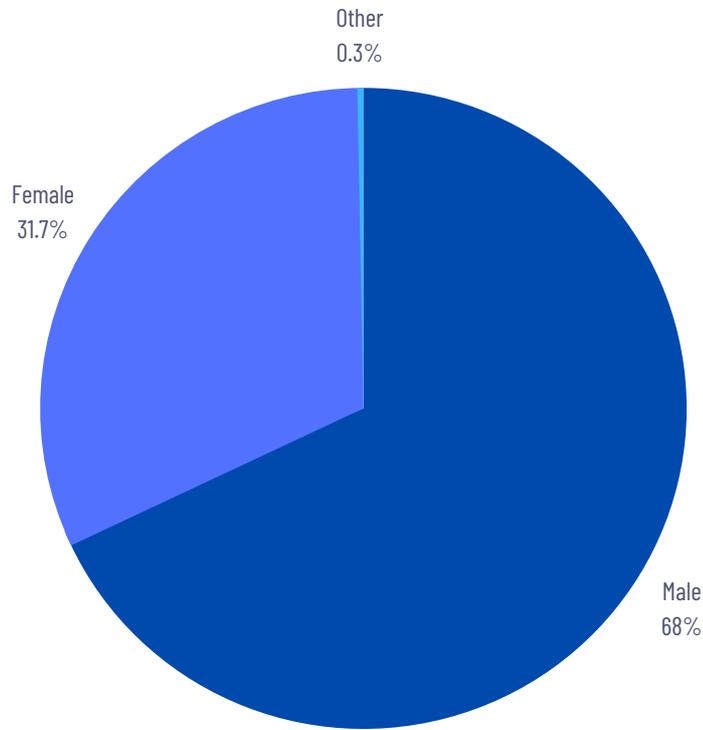
FAMILY STATUS



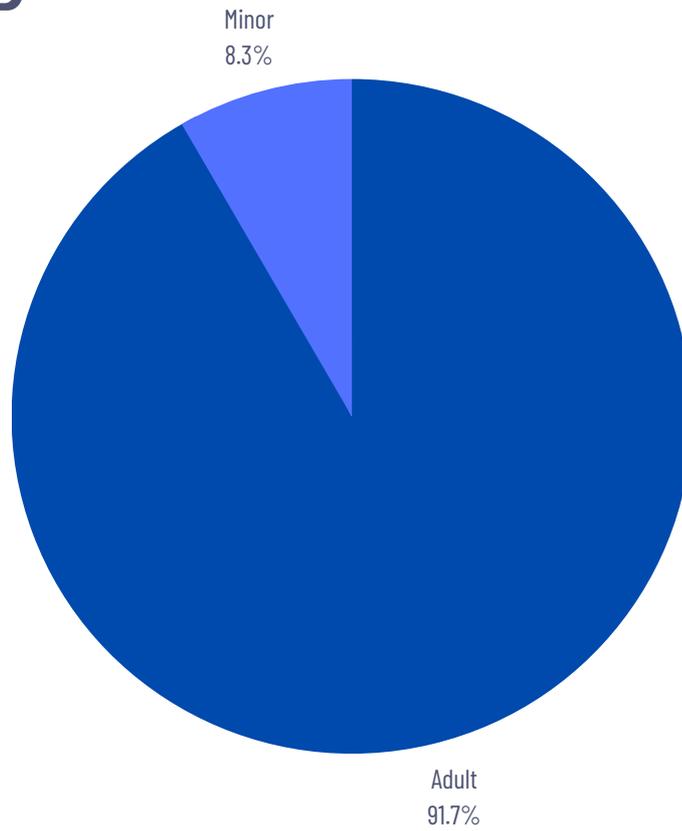
LANGUAGES



GENDER



AGE GROUP



REFERRALS

The referral system was reviewed and revised by the Client Services volunteers and the Operations Manager.

In-coming referrals: A.Ss.I.S.T. received 61 client referrals from diverse agencies and NGOs from both other Islands and the mainland. It was decided to provide up-dates on referrals on at least a quarterly basis to those organisations making a significant number of referrals. This is to reassure organisations that A.Ss.I.S.T. will continue to follow up irrespective on delays incurred in the processing of applications.

Out-going referrals: A.Ss.I.S.T. referred 23 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.

A client feedback form is being designed to find out from the clients if they received services from the agency to whom they were referred or if they found services elsewhere.

CLIENT SERVICES FEEDBACK

The new mobile friendly client feedback form has resulted in a much higher return rate than our previous form. A.Ss.I.S.T. has received 44 completed forms since mid-April 2023 and a sample of comments are provided below.

"I am very happy with your help, and with the lawyer and with the interpreter. Also very happy with the reception and everyone I have spoken to from the organisation. Thank you so much for your time and for helping me"

"You are the best people ever"

"Only thank you and please continue in this same spirit"

"I am personally very satisfied with your assistance and I would just like to say thank you again"

CHALLENGES

The challenges are too many to report –many are those faced by applicants and by A.Ss.I.S.T. since 2018, many others added over time continuing to the present.

From April to mid-June 2023, A.Ss.I.S.T. had only one Client Service Manager. Together with the Legal Representative, the Client Service Manager endeavoured to provide the best possible service to all clients and to answer as promptly as possible all enquiries. The Legal Representative assumed the administrative tasks usually assigned to two Client Services Managers.

The downtime of the Asylum Services electronic systems, mentioned above, created a new set of challenges: how often does one try to extract information.

LOOKING FORWARD

TRAINING:

A.Ss.I.S.T.'s Athens-based lawyer and Legal Representative continue to attend the on-line certificate entitled "Therapeutic Legal Assistance Model". A training workshop for all A.Ss.I.S.T. volunteers with Action for Women on Gender Based Violence will take place in Athens in July 2023. Another online workshop for all Team members, "Do's and Don'ts Interpreting for lawyers", is also being discussed to take place in the next Quarter. Training for lawyers in identifying victims of human trafficking has been brought to A.Ss.I.S.T.'s attention and is being discussed. Timing to be confirmed.

VISITS:

In August, we will welcome a visit to Chios by our newest A.Ss.I.S.T. Partner, Ms. Rakel Sesser.

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment is on-going with replacements for the Client Services Managers required to assure adequate handover to incoming volunteers. A new volunteer Operations Manager is also being recruited and the search for interpreters for Lingala and French interpreters continues.

FUNDING

A number of new funding opportunities have been identified, and we will continue to fundraise to ensure the sustainability of A.Ss.I.S.T.'s work going into 2024.



THANK YOU
for your continued support

