



Activity Interim Report January - June 2021

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Pictures:

Thank you to Regis and Jerome for the pictures used in this report.

EQUAL LEGAL AID (ELA)

A FEW FIGURES...

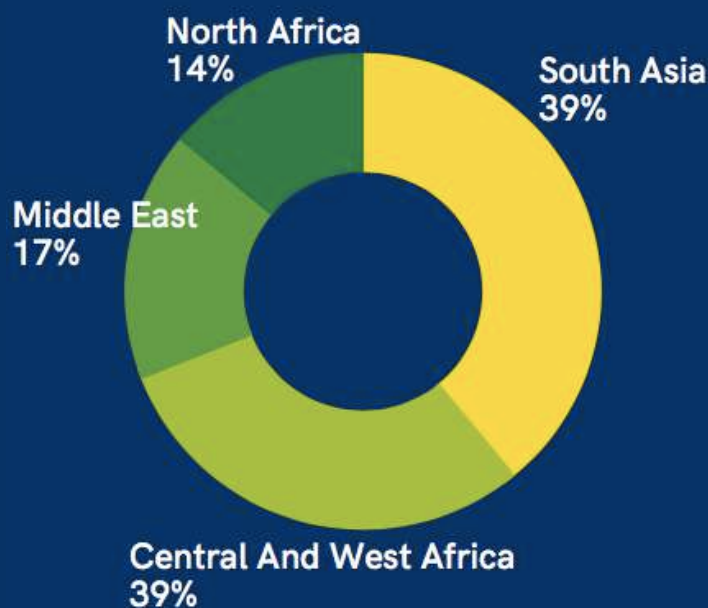
OUR TEAM SUPPORTED :



255 Beneficiaries:

- 125 cases
- 3 appeal memos
- 127 legal consultations
- 115 Interview preparations

Beneficiaries are coming from 21 different countries



are less than 30 years old
(Incl. 28% under 18)



are women



are families

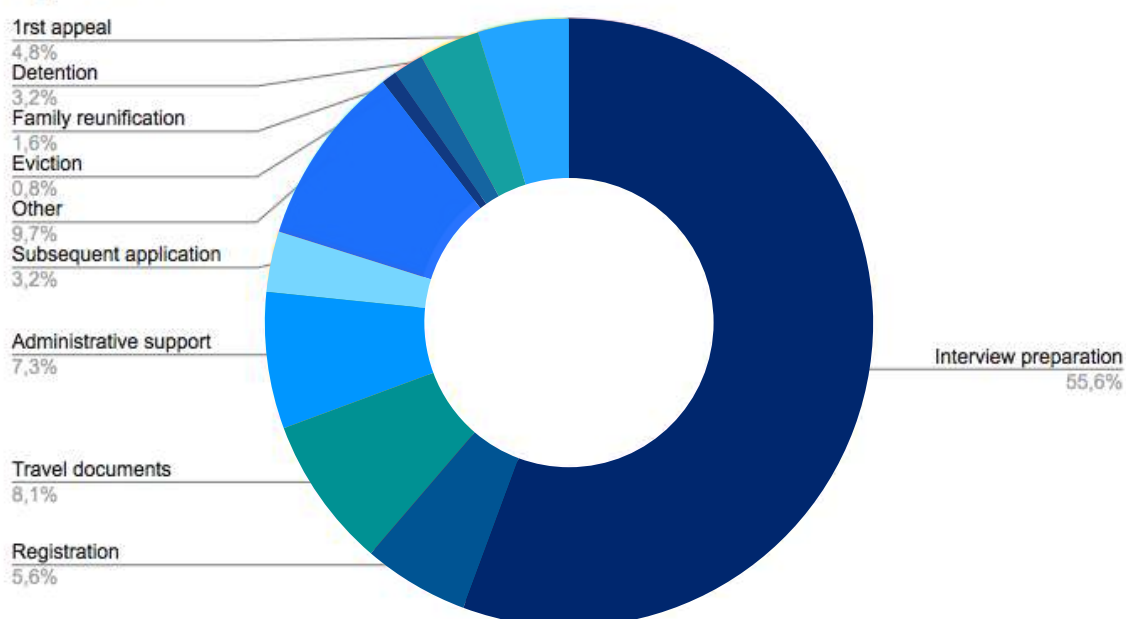
Legal services provided to displaced persons

From January to June 2021, our legal staff supported **125 cases** in total, performing **127 individual legal consultations** and **115 interview preparation sessions**.

During the given period, legal support has been provided to a wide variety of cases, at different stages of the asylum procedure. Most importantly, our legal staff has assisted asylum seekers in preparing for their personal interview. Indeed, the personal interview during which an applicant explains the reasons of his/her exile, is the cornerstone of the asylum procedure and the main focus of ELA. Our legal staff has assisted 69 cases prior to their interview, hence performing 115 individual interview preparation sessions with an interpreter. Preparing applicants to the interview is essential in order for them to understand fully the importance of the interview and be ready to present their claim in details and with supportive evidence.

In addition to interview preparations, our legal staff has also provided guidance prior to the lodging of the asylum request, at the registration stage, and after a 1st or 2nd rejection or to prepare a subsequent application. Assistance has been provided to recognized refugees as well, for instance for the issuance of their residence permits and travel documents. Finally, our legal staff has provided guidance in the use of the new online platform of the Ministry of Migration and Greek Asylum Service in order for asylum seekers to gain autonomy and be able to lodge specific administrative requests by themselves. In particular, we have assisted with transfer of cases from one Asylum Office to the other, with registration and updates of personal data, or request for copies of the files.

Type of cases:



115 Individual sessions

to prepare applicants for international protection to their personal interviews (status determination hearing), corresponding to **69 cases**; On average, **2 individual sessions** with a lawyer and an interpreter for each case, with sessions lasting from **1 hour to 3 hours**.

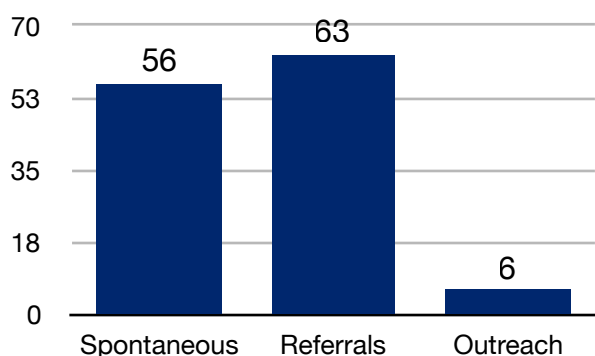
127 individual counseling sessions

regarding various issues related to asylum procedures

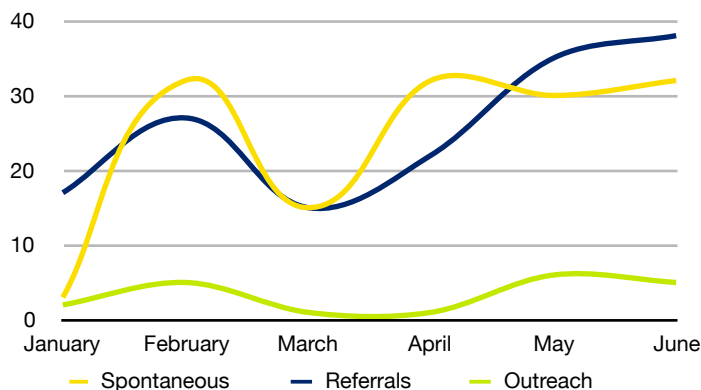
3 Appeal memos

submitted to the Appeal Committee following a rejection decision at first instance

50% of the cases handled by our legal staff **were referred to ELA by local organisations**, grassroots and partners. 45% of the cases were spontaneous legal assistance requests from displaced persons, made on our hotline and 5% of the cases were the result of previous outreach efforts, prior to or in between lockdown measures (legal clinics and streetwork).

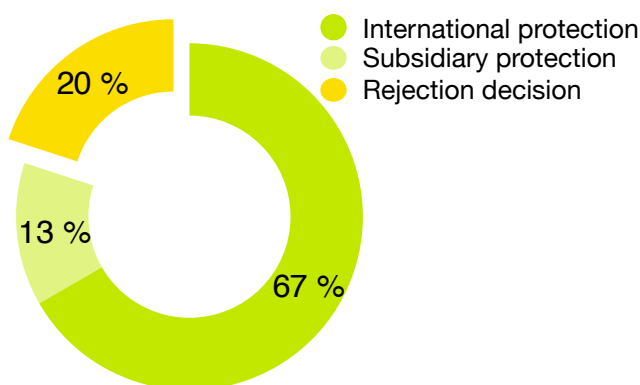


Origin of the cases (by number of cases)
Total numbers from January to June



Origin of the cases (by number of cases)
Evolution by month from January to June

Most of the cases assisted during this period are still pending before the Greek Asylum Service. However, in some of the cases supported during the pilot-project (September to December 2020) or early on in 2021, applicants have received a final decision on their asylum request.

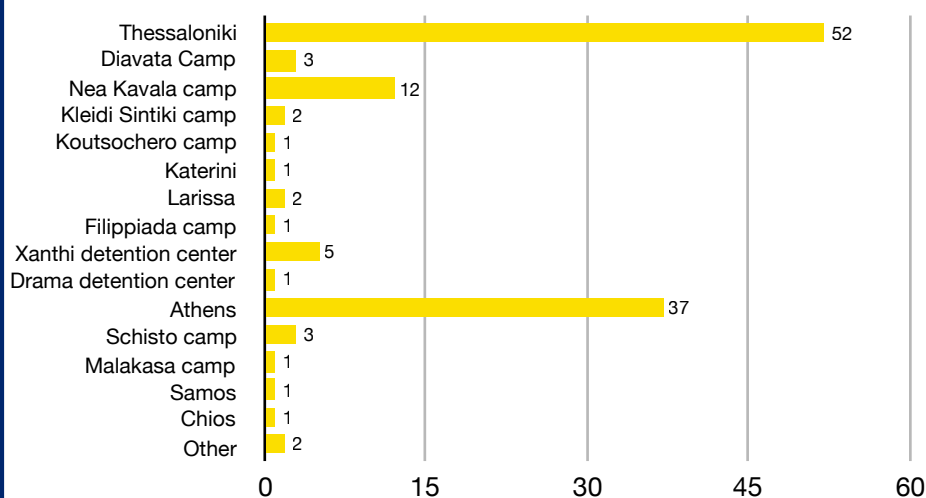


Final outcome for the asylum requests supported by ELA: (When the outcome is known and by cases? By individuals the cognition rate for both international and subsidiary protection for applicants with ELA is 89%.)

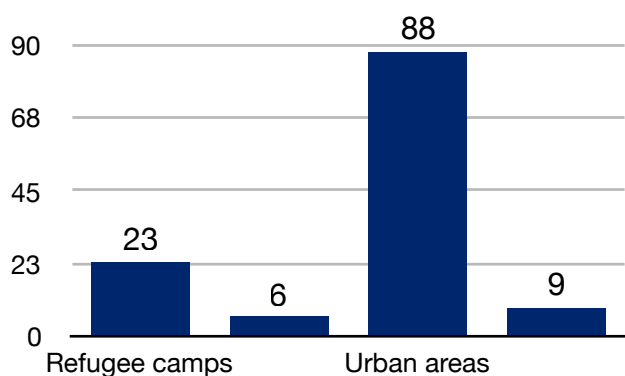
80% of those cases were granted either international protection or subsidiary protection in Greece. 20% of those cases unfortunately received a negative decision. It is worth mentioning that, in Greece, the recognition rate for international or subsidiary protection was 56% in 2020 according to the annual report published by the Greek Asylum office.

Since June 2021, our legal staff is able to assist applicants after a rejection decision at 1st instance by assisting them in preparing a legal memo to submit to the Appeal Committee. 3 memos have been prepared and submitted by our staff in June 2021 and we hope to continue supporting our beneficiaries at this crucial stage of the procedure. For now, those 3 cases are still pending before the Appeal Committee.

Despite the challenges it entails, working remotely **has some upsides**. It has allowed our staff to reach out to asylum seekers and migrants living in 16 different locations, mostly located in **Central Macedonia (56%)** and particularly in the **city of Thessaloniki (42%)**, but also in the regions of **Thessaly, Epirus and Thrace all located in Northern Greece (7% of our beneficiaries)** and finally in the **Attica region (33%)** especially in the capital, Athens.



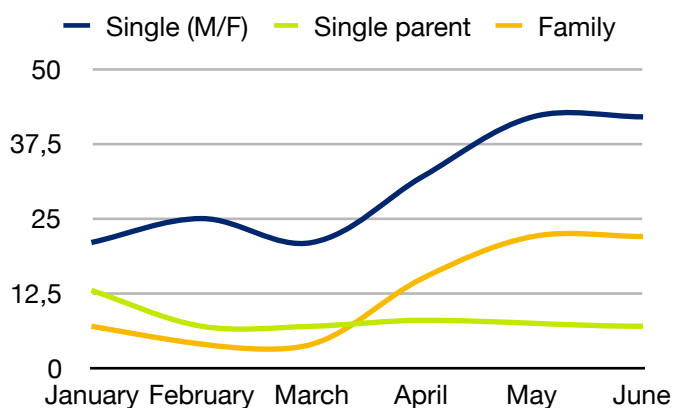
Type of location (by number of cases)
Total numbers from January to June



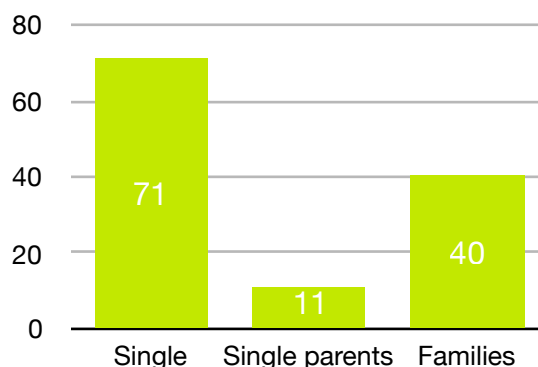
Out of all our beneficiaries, it is worth mentioning that **18%** are currently residing **in a remote refugee camp** (such as Nea Kavala, Diavata, or Serres refugee camps) and **5% in a closed detention facility** (in Xanthi or Drama).

Type of accommodation (by number of cases)
Total numbers from January to June

Our legal staff is assisting **mostly single asylum seekers (57%) or single parents (9%)**. Our staff has also noticed a significant increase in requests for legal help from families. Families are a vulnerable group that is usually assisted by well-established and pluridisciplinary NGOs, providing them with various services such as psychosocial and educational support and legal assistance. However, since the end of 2020, many of those organisation have downsized and are no longer able to provide legal support. As a consequence, those families now have to look for external legal help.



Family Status (by number of cases)
Evolution from January to June

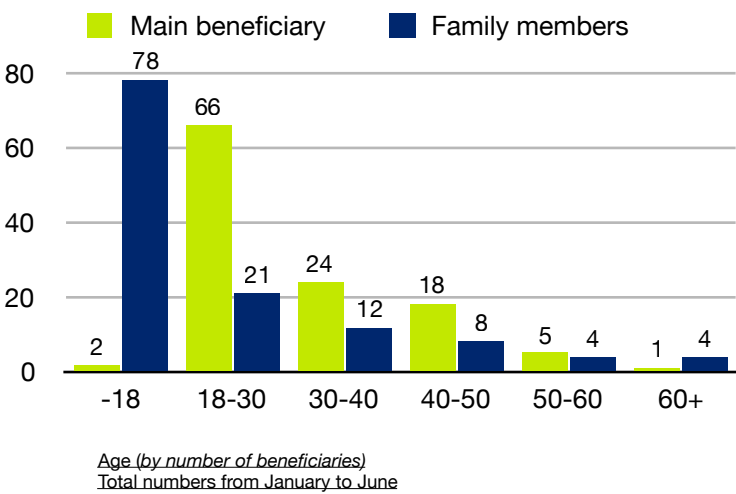


Family Status (by number of cases)
Total numbers from January to June

During the given period, our legal staff has assisted displaced persons from **21 countries**. Most of our beneficiaries were originating from **Afghanistan (32%)** or **Central and West African countries (32%)**. Hence, a vast majority of our beneficiaries were either Farsi/Dari speakers (36%) or French/English speakers (32%). 16% of our beneficiaries were Arabic speakers. The origins of our beneficiaries have been steady since the beginning of the pilot-project in Septembre 2020, showing consistency in nationalities and language spoken.

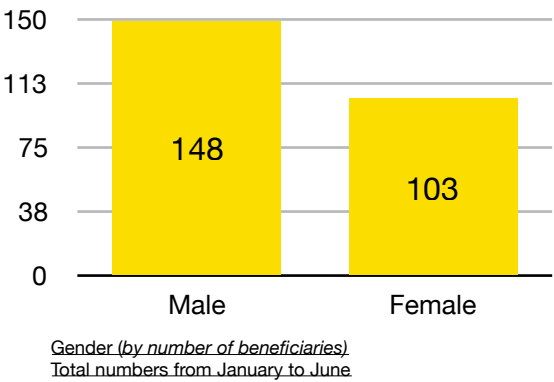
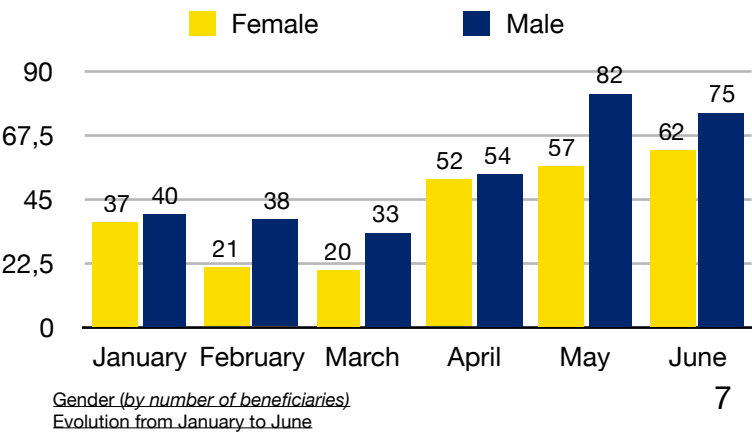


West and Central Africa: 33% North Africa: 13% Middle East: 17% South Asia: 36,5%



Most of our beneficiaries are aged below 30 years old (66%, out of which 30% are underaged).

Finally, 40% of our beneficiaries were women.



TESTIMONIES FROM OUR BENEFICIARIES:

Transféré

Thanks so much for your time. We appreciate each and every moment of your time
We feel blessed to have you as our legal aid.

12:28

Hi Juliet,
I think I expressed my case well
I repeat my thanks for your interest
I wish you and your team
All the best and success

13:17

Transféré

A big thanks for boosting our confidence b4 the
interview

18:26

Thank you so much♥

17:54

Transféré

Bonjour Madame,
Désolé de vous revenir plutôt ce matin. Je me suis libéré un peu tardivement hier soir.
Je tout d'abord vous dire merci pour toutes vos contributions car vous nous avez appris
beaucoup de choses sur la procédure d'asile. Par la suite vous avez été d'une
transparence et d'une humilité sans pareil car accepter de travailler avec un autre
cabinet est preuve de grandeur et surtout que vous voulez la réussite de notre dossier.
Rassurez vous que je vous tiendrais au courant de l'évolution dudit dossier.

10:01

Transféré

Bonsoir et merci encore pour tout.

09:41

Transféré

Bonne après-midi Juliette et merci beaucoup pour ton soutien et porte bien que Dieu te
bénisse

09:40

Thanks for helping me

12:10

My sister and i have been granted refugee states 13:11



13:11

My parent have been granted subsidiary protection 16:48

Thanks its because of you 17:12

Yeah understand it's really kind that's what u are doing thank you 🍷🙏

Thanks. You helped me a lot, I got a positive answer 18:52



18:53



Additional activities organized by ELA

Contrary to what was initially intended (and planned), it has been impossible to organize any physical activity during almost the entire duration of the 1st semester of 2021, due to the restrictions in place in Thessaloniki. However, and after the restrictions were partially lifted at the end of May 2021, we were able to organize a **visit to the detention center of Paranesti Drama with our colleagues from Elpida Home** and a **joint streetwork session with our colleagues from Mobile Info Team**.

Both activities were significant as they allowed our staff (sometimes new to this field) to discover another aspect of our daily activities: on one hand, the legal hurdles of individuals detained in closed facilities with no access to legal aid; On the other hand, the **challenges faced** by homeless asylum seekers surviving in the outskirts of the city.

It is intended to continue those activities in the future and as much as the health situation allows it.



Networking and ongoing partnerships

Networking and collaborating is essential to provide quality services to our beneficiaries. Therefore, building strong links with local organisations and exploring potential partnership opportunities and synergies is one of the objectives of ELA's program for 2021.

For the 1st semester of 2021, ELA has committed to develop its network composed of local grassroots, multipurpose NGOs based in Greece and/or within the EU, and Bar associations. In order for ELA to present its activities, learn more about services provided by others and discuss potential synergies, several meetings were held in the presence of the Director and/or the Project Coordinator with:

- The Hellenic League for Human Rights, based in Athens;
- The Association for Judicial Studies on Migration (ASGI) based in Italy;
- The SolidarityNow center in Thessaloniki;
- The Medecins du Monde Clinic of Thessaloniki;
- The United Societies of Balkan in Thessaloniki;
- A21 in Thessaloniki;
- Diotima, based in Thessaloniki;
- The local antenna of the Greek Council for Refugees, in particular the coordinator of the legal staff;
- The local antenna of Caritas, in particular its project manager in Thessaloniki;
- The local antenna of PRAKSIS, in particular its legal staff;
- ELPIDA, based in Thessaloniki (in particular the in-house lawyer);
- IRIDA (InterVolve), based in Thessaloniki (in particular the in-house lawyer);
- UNHCR, in Thessaloniki (in particular the head of the legal staff).
- WAVE and MVI initiatives, both based in Thessaloniki.

Those meetings are important to understand the exact scope of activities of other projects and discuss referral pathways and modus operandi. As shown above, an important part of ELA's beneficiaries are referred by other projects, and it is important that our staff is communicating frequently with those other actors.

ELA has also been in touch with international law firms, especially with the Firm **DLA Piper** and its European Pro Bono Team. Ongoing negotiations are currently taking place regarding another international firm. In parallel, ELA has been selected by **BNP Paribas** to receive assistance on a pro bono basis (especially regarding HR tools and contracts).

ELA has started to work with the french organisation **Thanks For Nothing** for the purpose of preparing a communication and fundraising campaign for the end of 2021 and 2022.

By maintaining and developing relationships with other organisations, Bar associations, ELA intends to gain knowledge on good practices, create referral pathways, learn about advocacy projects in order to both assist its beneficiaries well and participate in raising awareness on the situation of asylum seekers in Greece and the deteriorating conditions under which nonprofits are currently working.

As shown above, an important part of ELA's beneficiaries are referred by other projects (50%)

Continuous trainings & conferences

During the last 6 months, our growing team has dedicated consistent effort into building up our intellectual resources (in particular our internal database of regulations, jurisprudence, reports and sources). To do so, **we put in place a regular legal and judicial watch**, so as to update our legal staff every week on a dedicated channel. In parallel, and to ensure a continuous training of the legal staff, **the team has participated in numerous workshops, conferences and webinars related to Migration and Asylum laws**. In particular, ELA's team participated to the following conferences:

- The RED CROSS EU webinar "Family Reunification in Europe" on 05/02/21;
- The European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) webinar "Erosion of the Rule of Law – Authoritarianism and Shrinking Spaces" on 26/02/21;
- The French National Bar Council webinar on "Pleading human rights: the universal system" on 15 and 18/03/21;
- The Caritas International webinar on "Economic migration and migrant workers' rights" on 19/03/21;
- The ASYLO webinar on "Country condition information - UK" on 24/03/21;
- The ASGI webinar on "Pushbacks in the Mediterranean area" on 26/03/21;
- The MigrEurope seminar on "the European Pact on Migration and Asylum" on 31/03/21;
- A webinar on "*The European framework for return policies across the Euro-Mediterranean region*" on 22/04/21;
- A conference on "*Gender, migration and vulnerabilities*" on 27/04/21;
- A conference on housing exclusion in Europe on 06/05/21;
- A conference on Exile policies on 12/05/21
- A webinar on "High-Level Meeting on Ensuring Respect for the Human Rights of Migrants at Borders: The Role of NHRIs" on 02/06/21;
- A conference on racism and migration policies organised by Migreurop on 09/06/21.

In parallel, our team **had the chance to participate in several specialized trainings** over the past 6 months:

- On 22/04/21, the staff attended a 2hours training introducing and detailing a procedure before the European Court of Justice following pushbacks at the external EU borders;
- On 26/04/21, the staff received a 3hours training on detention and local (legal) practices in Northern Greece by the head of the legal staff of the UNHCR offices of Thessaloniki.
- On 30/06/21, the staff attended a 3hours training on procedural and legal aspects of asylum requests lodged by LGBTQI applicants in Greece, provided by the program Zaatari (based in Athens).

In addition to those external trainings, our staff has organized and participated in **several internal training**, covering various topics. For instance, the staff received a 3 hours internal training on geopolitical and cultural specificities in Afghanistan in April 2021. All current staff members are receiving a 3 hours introduction to the asylum procedure in Greece, in addition to mandatory readings prior to beginning the mission. Our staff has also shared its expertise with our partner organisation, Mobile Info Team by providing their team with a 3 hours training.



On 27/04/21, ELA's director and founder provided a 3hours training on asylum interview preparations to Mobile Info Team on procedural and legal aspects, suggested preparation format and ethical and behavioral guidelines.

Finally, ELA's project coordinator has been invited to speak at an online conference organized by SciencesPo Refugee Help on "Migration across the Turkey-Greece border" held on 31/03/21.

Organizational developments and ongoing projects

During the given period, many efforts were made to improve the structure of the organisation and its internal processes. In particular:

- ELA has drafted, adopted and started to implement a code of conduct, a child protection policy and a social media policy, as part of its **Safeguarding Policies** ; more tools are currently being drafted, including a safety policy.

- ELA has reviewed and updated its **internal case management tools**, and dedicated database to ensure the proper follow-up, handover and reporting on all cases, closed, dormant and active. This lengthy process, started in March, was completed in April 2021 in time to welcome new members in the team;

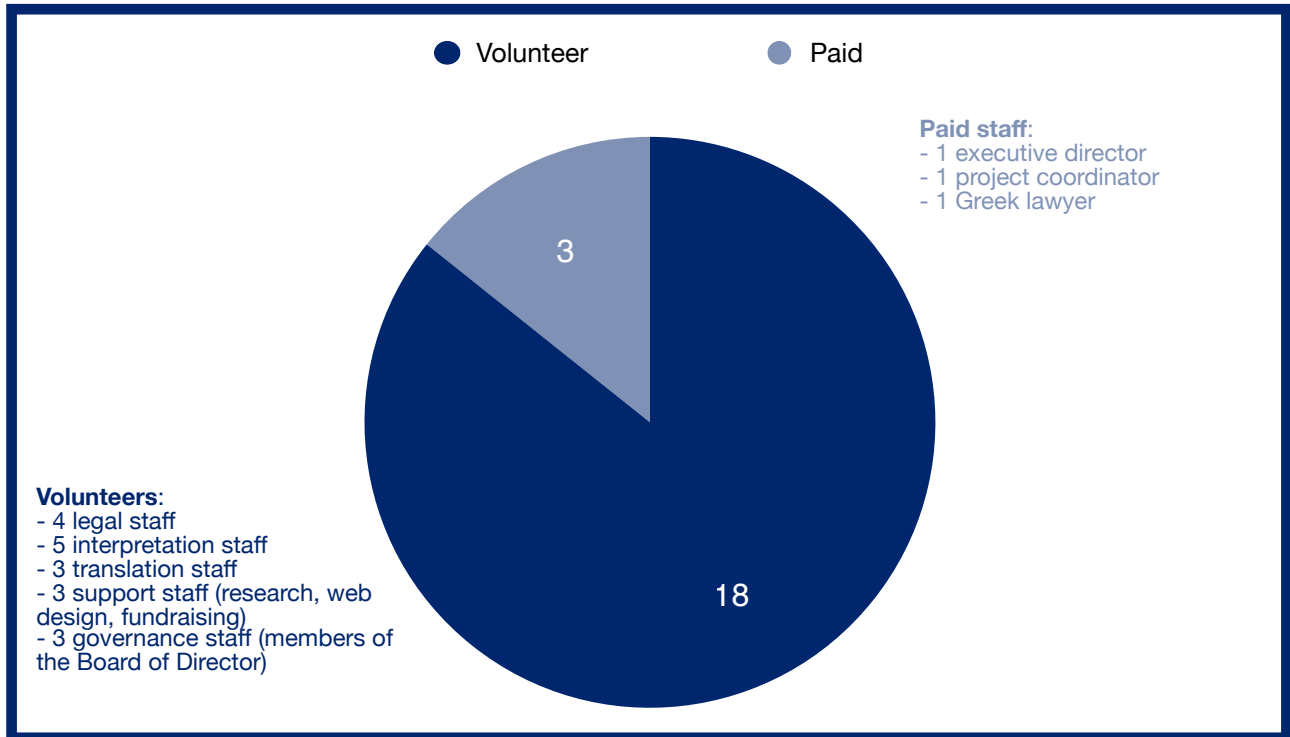
- ELA has implemented **fundraising and reporting monitoring tools**, started in February and finalized in March 2021.

While the structure of the organization is progressively taking shape, its team has grown a lot during the past 6 months:

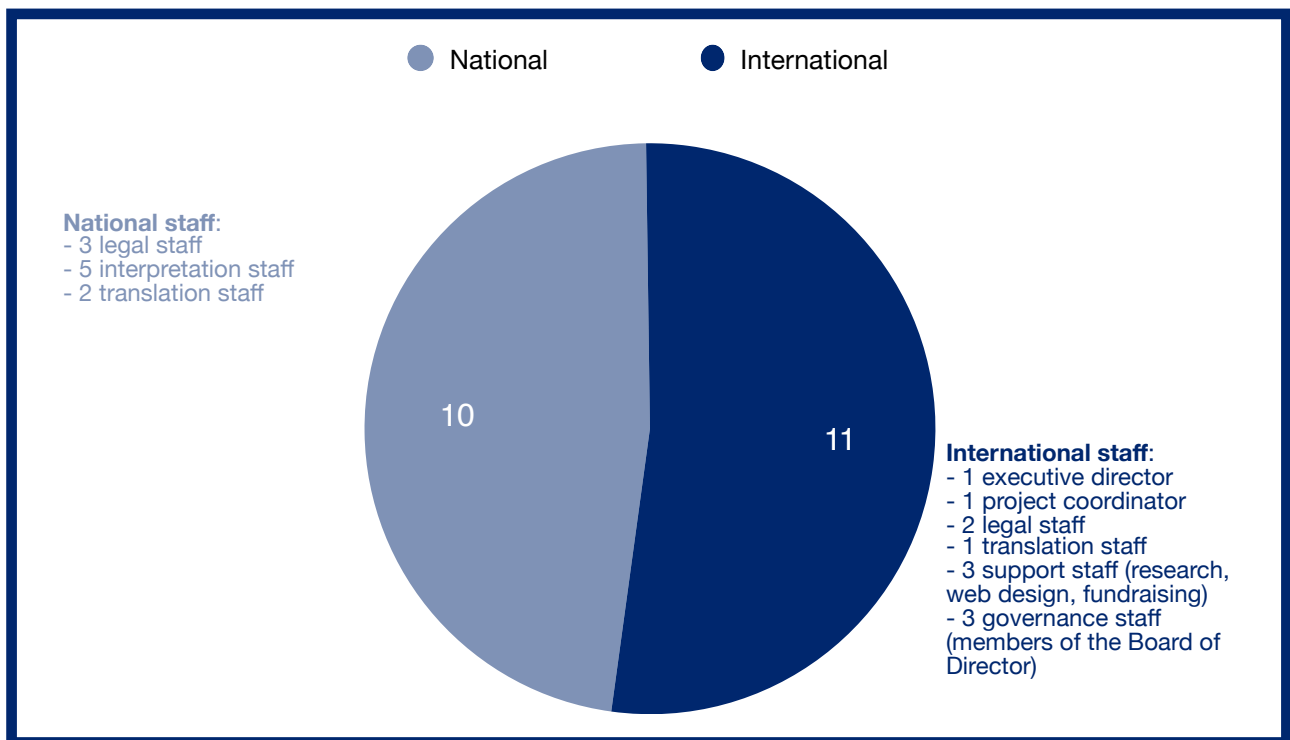
- 3 legal counsels/jurists/caseworkers have been recruited to occasionally assist the permanent team either on site or remotely;
- 1 greek lawyer has joined the permanent staff as well as one volunteer lawyer from another European country;
- Over the course of the given period, 8 interpreters have been recruited and trained to join our legal staff and assist during consultations.
- A consultancy mission on fundraising has been completed for the months of February and March 2021 and a donors' relations volunteer position has been opened and filled for the rest of the year;
- 2 volunteer translators have been recruited to help with day-to-day services remotely;
- One greek lawyer and one volunteer lawyer from the EU have joined our permanent staff in June 2021

ELA will be moving in its own premisses during the summer and will be able to receive beneficiaries in condition respecting their privacy and safety by September 2021.

Volunteer and paid staff



National and international staff

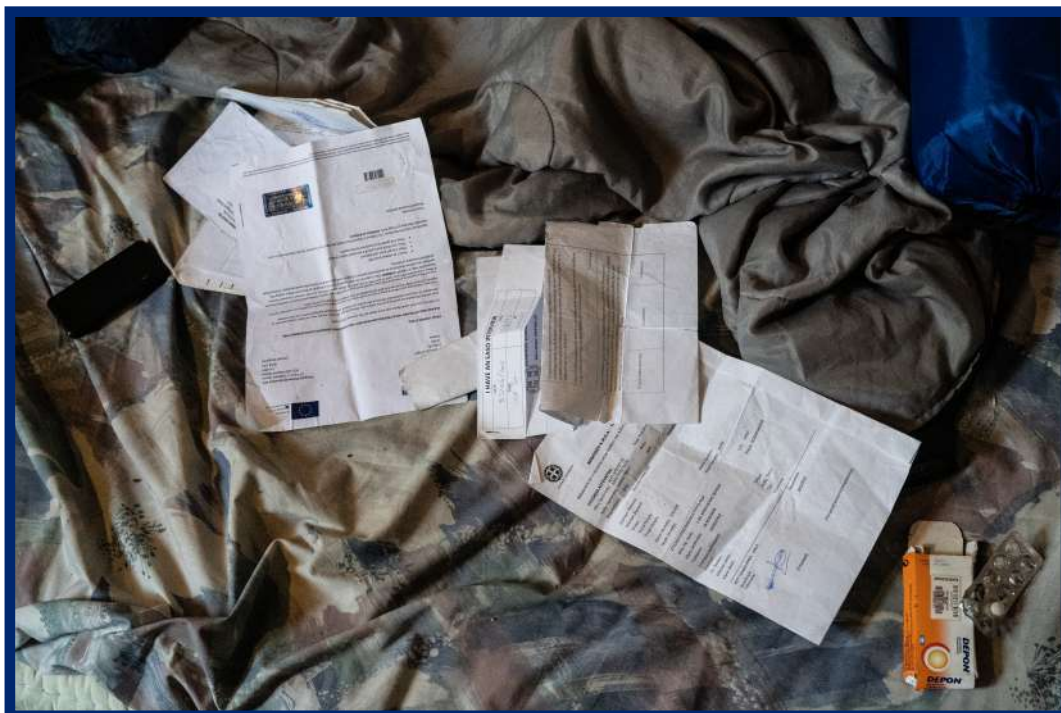


Advocacy projects

While the project is growing progressively, it is important that ELA starts to prepare future advocacy projects. to prepare future advocacy projects. With this in mind, our staff has started to participate to several discussions and in particular has been attending the national bi-monthly advocacy meetings since May 2021. Those meetings provide a forum for discussing and exchanging with other non-profit actors in Greece on legal and structural issues faced by asylum seekers, such as the end of cash assistance for self-accommodated asylum seekers or the decision adopted by the Government in June 2021, declaring Turkey safe for applicants from Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria, Pakistan and Bangladesh. For the moment, our legal staff has started to work on 2 specific advocacy projects:

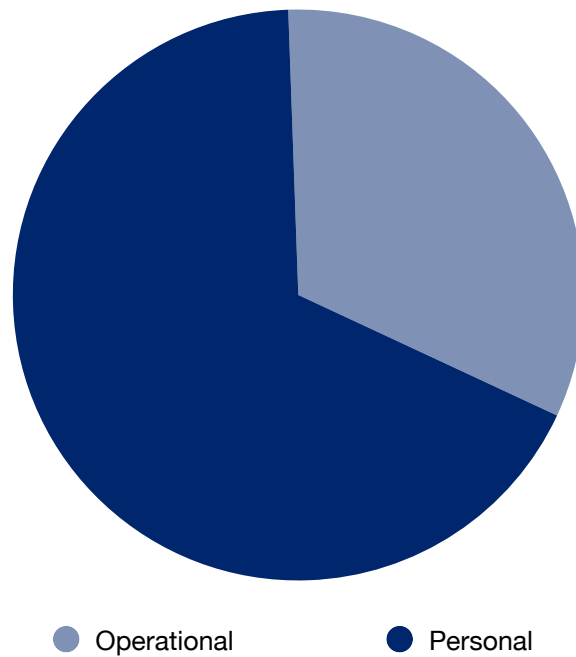
- A survey on access to legal assistance** in Northern Greece/on the continent: the 10-question survey is entirely anonymous and available online in 8 languages. Several (informal) partners in Northern Greece have already accepted to circulate this survey among their beneficiaries which will allow to get a clearer picture of the lack and thereof need of legal aid in the broader area. The survey will officially be launched in August 2021 and it is intended to communicate on the result by the Autumn 2021;
- A comprehensive report/article on procedural and legal obstacles faced by asylum seekers in Greece and a potential complaint to the Greek Ombudsman:** the format of this project is not yet known; it is intended to start this project after the publication of the survey result, at the end of the year 2021 or beginning of 2022.

Finally, ELA has applied for the Pro Bono contest organized by the Paris Bar Association and has been pre-selected. The result of this contest will be known in October 2021.

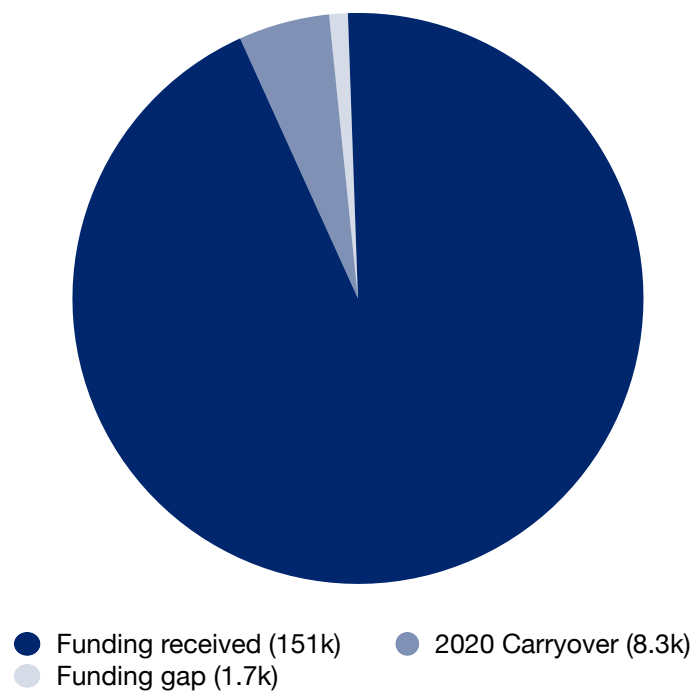


Budget and fundraising:

ELA's 2021 Budget - 161,324.10 EUR



ELA's 2021 funding



Difficulties faced over the course of the given period:

Both the pilot-project (implemented from September to December 2020), and **the first semester** of the annual project were implemented in very challenging conditions as Thessaloniki (and the world in general) has been facing **successive** lockdowns and restrictions measures since the 7th of November 2020. **In the 10-months life of ELA (from September 2020 to June 2021), 7 months took place in a context of national lockdown.**

The entire program of the organisation has been modified in order to adapt to this new reality and for the organisation to maintain activities in a very difficult context. **The restrictions of movement and the lockdown have impacted all aspects of the life of the organisation.**

Those restrictions of movement, lockdowns and **various limitations** have impacted **all aspects** of the project and life of the association. The entire program has been reviewed **in light of the health and sanitary** situation, in order to adapt to this new reality and maintain activities **for our beneficiaries and comply with national and local regulations**. Since it was impossible to maintain in-person activities, all services have been provided remotely, since the end of October 2020. To do so, our legal staff had to adapt, create and improve new tools allowing them to get and stay in touch easily with beneficiaries, provide guidance in a confidential manner and work from home as efficiently as possible. Our staff used a hotline and available free applications online, accessible to our beneficiaries. This modus operandi though allowing to actively reach out to beneficiaries, is not adapted to the type of services provided or envisaged by ELA. However, maintaining activities in a context of extreme isolation and lack of access to basic information was a priority for our team.

In parallel, **and inevitably**, the **development of** the association itself has been **greatly** delayed has been delayed by the lockdown measures. Firstly, it has been impossible to recruit field volunteers. Without a field experience and on-site training, remote volunteers are not able to assist with legal procedures. As a result, the permanent team has had to handle all the cases with very limited capacity, which has been extremely challenging. Secondly, administrative formalities linked to the registration of the entity in Greece have been entirely stopped until recently due to the impossibility to make appointments with the authorities and move on with a difficult procedure involving different administrations and services.

Finally, the overall context of intervention has drastically changed during the past year, not only because of the pandemic but also in terms of policies and working conditions, with organisations working under the constant threat of criminalization, general fear of the local authorities and very complex legal cases.

The **political and legal local environment** has been changing for the worst for the past year and in various aspects. The legal framework for asylum in Greece has both tightened and been delayed, rendering the provision of legal services even more difficult than before, with a lot of uncertainties and a drastic increase in requests from asylum seekers with 2nd rejection decisions. The living conditions of asylum seekers and migrants have worsened, leading to more requests for decent housing and monthly allowance, which are not areas of intervention of ELA and as a result, created frustrations for lack of efficient referral pathways. Other local organisations have been facing financial difficulties for several months which has massively impacted the legal sector as most traditional legal services providers have ended/suspended/reduced their program. This has led to an increasing number of referrals and spontaneous requests to ELA and a change of demographics in the beneficiaries of the organisation: more vulnerable cases than before, more families and underaged beneficiaries.

The legal staff reduction in all local projects is extremely worrying and renders it even more essential for ELA to continue implementing its program and developing its activities, as the needs for legal help is constantly growing

Our partners & supporters:

In 2021, ELA's activities are supported by a great number of donors: Aid Hoc, Lyon Bar Association, Marseille Bar Association, Choose Love, the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM), Fondation Gratitude, Fondation Lucq Espérance, Fondation PAM, Fondation UMPT, Fonds Inkermann and Secours Catholique. We also received individual donations through our [HelloAsso](#) page.





Equal Legal Aid

January - June 2021

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