



EQUAL LEGAL AID

Activity Report

January - June 2022

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Report drafted by Juliette Malfaisan and Juliette Tassy

Highlights 2022

In Greece and Europe

15 February 2022

In Greece, the list of safe countries of origin is updated by a joint decision between the Minister of Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarakis, and the Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miltiadis Varvitsiotis. In particular, following the recommendation of the Asylum Service, Egypt, Nepal and Benin are added to the list. At the same time, Ghana, Senegal, Togo, Gambia, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Albania, Georgia, Ukraine, India, Armenia, Pakistan and Bangladesh keep their status of safe country of origin. The total number of safe countries of origin on the list currently amounts to seventeen.

22 February 2022

The Greek Government announces that the number of housing places available in the ESTIA II programme will be reduced from 16 April 2022. Places will be limited to 10,000 out of the 27,000 available in 2021, with the aim of completing the programme by the end of 2022. This decision will have detrimental consequences on asylum seekers and will push entire families onto the streets, thus showing a clear regression in terms of integration.

26 April 2022

The UN Human Rights Council publishes a report on human rights violations at borders (to which ELA contributed), which investigates recent developments on migration and border governance as well as their impact on the human rights of migrants.

In particular, the Rapporteur deplores the regrettable tendency to legitimise refoulements at borders and criticises the generalisation of the concept of safe third countries. Finally, he expresses concerns about “the significant increase in the number of people prevented from entering Greece, as a strategy of the State's authorities”.



28 April 2022

Fabrice Leggeri - the director of Frontex, the European Border Guard Agency - resigns upon shocking revelations about the agency's questionable practices, published by a large number of European newspapers. These criticisms are compounded by an investigation by the EU's anti-fraud office into cases of illegal deportation at borders.

The investigation reveals that Frontex was involved in the refoulement of "at least 957 asylum seekers in the Aegean Sea between March 2020 and September 2021".

The resignation comes in a context of reinforcement and militarisation of the European Border Guard Agency, whose budget has been drastically increased from 143 to 543 million euros from 2015 to 2021. The agency's staff should reach 10,000 by 2027.

10 June 2022

The Greek Parliament adopts Law 4939/2022 codifying the legislative provisions on reception, international and subsidiary protection regimes. Presented as a codification of the existing legislative provisions, the law was subjected to an accelerated adoption procedure, without in-depth and public examination. However, the law introduces significant changes to the existing legal regime. The accelerated adoption of this law without public debate is denounced by many legal professionals and migrant rights defenders, as well as by Greek civil society actors.

One year after 7 June 2021

On 7 June 2021, the Greek government declared Turkey a safe third country for Afghan, Syrian, Somali, Pakistani and Bangladeshi nationals with the consequence of subjecting them to an "admissibility" procedure in order to facilitate removals to Turkey without examining the merits of the applications.

As Afghan, Syrian and Somali nationals constitute the largest contingent of asylum seekers in Greece - with very high rates of international protection grant (and for good reason!) - this decision has the effect of restricting access to asylum for 65% of applicants. Moreover, Turkey has repeatedly stated that it will not accept any returns from Greece as long as there will be collective illegal refoulements at the borders. Unfortunately, only asylum seekers pay the price of this political impasse, with very high rejection rates and disastrous consequences on their living conditions. As a consequence, the applicants rejected as inadmissible are blocked on Greek territory for an indefinite period, without papers, shelter and the possibility of exercising their rights.

One year after its adoption, ELA and 39 other organisations ask for the immediate repeal of this unacceptable decision via an [online petition](#). One month later, the petition has received support from more than a thousand individuals and organisations from all over Europe. MEP Damien Carême has also co-signed the petition.

The context of our intervention

An increasingly deteriorating context

For the first time since the launch of the pilot project in September 2020, our team was able to resume 'normal' activities during the first part of 2022. The restrictions linked to the pandemic were eased and then progressively lifted, allowing our team to function - almost - normally, while maintaining the shielding and preventive measures in place. Our team was able to meet beneficiaries in person, visit asylum offices and the Court of Appeal, as well as organising and participating in outreach activities uninterrupted throughout the reporting period. This positive development is to be welcomed: it has enriched our interactions with beneficiaries and our work.

On the other hand, the human rights situation in Greece (and especially the rights of displaced persons and those who defend them) continues to deteriorate: the New Democracy government is particularly hostile and is multiplying its attacks against displaced persons and their defenders. This has been noted by the international community: Greece has been singled out, for example, for the deterioration of press freedom and downgraded in the international rule of law index. The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants denounced Greece's de facto policy of illegal refoulements in his recent report, published in April. A few weeks later, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders also denounced "the suffocating effect of the Greek government's migration policy on civil society" in a press release.

A sharp decline in the rights of displaced persons

Since its election in July 2019, the government has consistently tightened the legal framework for asylum with the adoption of multiple laws, regulations and circulars. Over the past 12 months, three measures in particular have impacted our action:

- the extension of the admissibility procedure to Afghans, Syrians, Somalis, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis throughout Greece's mainland, adopted on 6 June 2021. This measure is considerably restricting access to asylum for people of these five nationalities, while at the same time no returns have taken place to Turkey since March 2020;
- the permanent closure of the online asylum application system (on the Skype application) on 22 November 2021: with this particularly controversial circular, the Ministry of Migration has de facto suspended the filing of new asylum applications on the Greek mainland, in direct violation of European and international laws. At the time of writing, it is still practically impossible to file an asylum application on Greek territory;
- the announcement of the definitive shutdown of the ESTIA II accommodation programme, which is expected to push thousands of asylum seekers onto the streets by the end of 2022.

Besides these three key-measures, there are a myriad of others, which are difficult to summarise in a few lines: the multiplication of procedural obstacles, the "monetarisation" of the asylum procedure with the introduction of all kinds of taxes and procedural fees, the increase in rejection decisions, etc. As a result, we are witnessing a worrying decline in the rights of displaced persons in Greece that nothing seems to curb, not even the multiple injunctions of the European Court of Human Rights.

The increase in institutional and police violence

In addition to the "legal" charge, there are coarse and deadly methods whose purpose is obvious: to bring down migration figures at all costs, which the Greek government is always keen to boast about.

All means are used to achieve this goal: harassment of asylum seekers by the authorities (and in particular ethnic profiling and increase in "broom operations" in neighbourhoods inhabited by foreigners), incremental detention of asylum seekers in dystopian prison-like camps, bureaucratic harassment, chain evictions, coercive measures against activists and defenders of migrants' rights, and finally, extreme militarisation of the border with Turkey and mass illegal refoulements, denounced again recently in a shocking investigation published by the newspapers Le Monde, The Guardian, and Der Spiegel.

Institutional and police violence is reaching its peak in Greece and a climate of fear has crept into migrant communities and civil society.

Fewer asylum applications, fewer rights

It is a grim achievement of the government that very few new asylum applications have been registered in Greece over the last 12 months. And for good reason: even if a person crosses the border without being pushed back, they still have to be able to apply for asylum, which has been practically impossible since November 2021. Moreover, with the government's successive reforms, the assistance of a lawyer has become essential at almost every stage of the procedure. Without such assistance, the applicant is completely powerless to assert his rights. But legal aid is not a given: in addition to the inherently prohibitive cost of a private lawyer for a resourceless person, the number of lawyers in the pro bono sector is also insufficient to cover the needs (for an overview of access to legal aid in Northern Greece, see [our report](#) published in January 2022).

A broader scope of intervention

Given the erratic nature of the circumstances in which we operate, since 2021, we have shifted our working methods to adapt to changing needs. For example, while new asylum applications are rare, rejection decisions are legion, even among communities that used to benefit from rather high recognition rates. This adjustment is occurring at different levels:

- in our human resources with the recruitment of a 3rd Greek lawyer in February 2022;
- in our finances, which now include a budget dedicated to procedural costs and court representation;
- in our interactions with other legal aid projects and pro bono lawyers;
- in the improvement of our tools for monitoring cases, which are becoming longer and more complex.

Compared to the same period in 2021, we note a 90% increase in our activities in terms of beneficiaries and cases supported, consultations and procedures undertaken over the first 6 months of the year. This increase is mainly due to the addition of litigation to our scope of intervention. We hope to contribute to the development of case law that is more favourable or at least more protective of the rights of displaced persons. Indeed, strategic litigation now appears to be the last resort available to us to ensure that international and European conventions are accounted for and to protect the rights of exiled persons.

The assertion of ELA in the local context

Since the launch of the pilot project in 2020, the association has developed very rapidly. From the end of 2021, ELA has become an important actor at the local level:

- firstly, thanks to its wider scope of intervention: ELA is one of the few organisations that does not filter requests for legal assistance by gender, age or sexual orientation. Our project currently has the widest scope of intervention in Thessaloniki in the field of asylum law and legal assistance;
- secondly, thanks to its relatively large and mixed team, composed of both Greek and international lawyers, which confers adaptability, credibility and reliability to our work;
- finally, by the allocation of a dedicated budget to litigation and court representation.

These three specificities make ELA a unique structure in the local non-profit landscape, as can be gauged by the large number of requests for assistance recorded over the last six months. These very specific requests confirm the need for legal assistance at the litigation stage of the procedure. This became clear to our team during the survey on access to legal aid at the end of 2021, but also during our exchanges with partner structures and of course in the analysis of the political and legal context. This is our strategic positioning in 2022, one that we hope will enable us to defend not only the individuals we assist but also the spirit and letter of international conventions repeatedly infringed upon.

Juliette Malfaisan
Director of ELA



Our action in 2022

366



beneficiaries
supported

181



cases
supported

375



consultations
offered

7

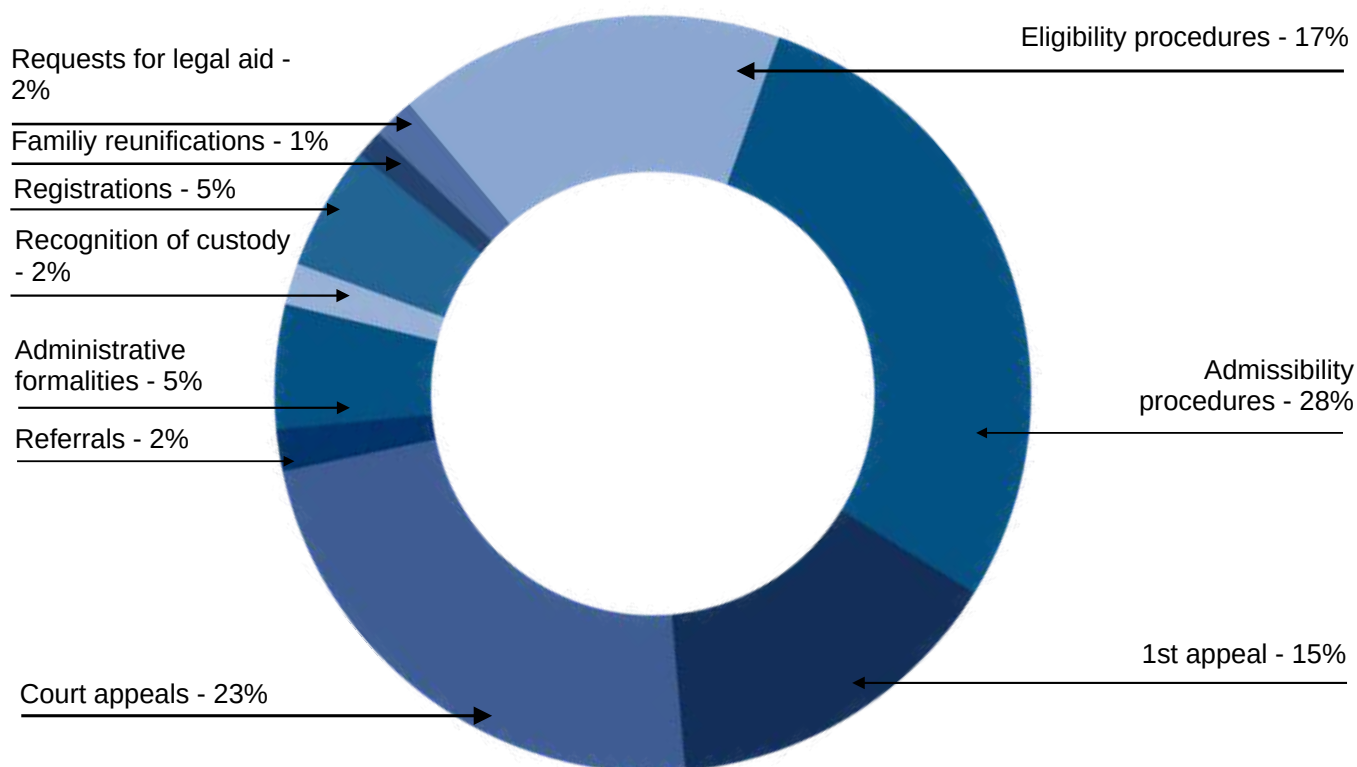


lawyers/legal
practitioners
deployed

In 2022, ELA continues to implement its legal aid project for displaced persons as the association has been doing since September 2020. From January to June 2022, thanks to a reinforced team and additional means, the association was able to accompany **366 beneficiaries**, support **181 cases** and provide **375 individual consultations**, including **74 interview preparation sessions**.

During this period, ELA's legal team included **3 Greek lawyers**, **1 lawyer/project coordinator** and **3 volunteer lawyers**.

Following the broadening of our scope of intervention, our team has been able to handle **169 procedures** over the last six months, at all stages of the asylum application, from its registration to appeals to the Court. Indeed, one of the major asset of our project is to offer full support throughout the asylum application process, even in the event of rejection. The procedures handled are distributed as follows:



Preparations for eligibility and admissibility interviews

During the period covered by this report, our team handled **28 admissibility procedures** and conducted **22 admissibility interview preparation sessions**. Of the **28 procedures followed**, only 1 is still ongoing. Of the procedures in which a decision has been taken by the authorities, **72% were deemed admissible** and 28% were rejected as inadmissible.

In addition, our team handled **48 eligibility procedures** and conducted **52 eligibility interview preparation sessions**. Of the eligibility procedures handled, 12 are still ongoing. Of the procedures in which a decision has been taken by the authorities, **71% received a positive decision** and 29% were rejected.

Quasi-judicial appeals to the Appeals Committee in Athens

From January to June 2022, our team filed **25 quasi-judicial (or first instance) appeals** to the Appeals Committee in Athens. 15 of these are still pending. All the appeals for which the outcome is known have been rejected. Indeed, the rate of positive decisions in appeals is only 4% in Greece at this stage of the procedure. However, this is a necessary step in order to be able to present the case to the Administrative Court of Appeal and perhaps set a precedent. It should be noted that this procedure is (so far) free of charge.

Appeals to the administrative court and representation before the courts

Over the same period, our team supported **26 applications for annulment** that are still pending before the administrative courts of appeal.

These applications for annulment on the merits are accompanied by applications for interim measures: **13 applications for interim measures** were filed during the period, 3 of which are still pending. These interim applications are used to challenge the applicant's deportation and to obtain a temporary residence permit until a decision on the merits is made by the court in the context of the application for annulment. To date, **all the interim applications filed by ELA have received a positive decision**, with provisional measures granted to the applicants.

Our team has also represented its beneficiaries in court in proceedings for the recognition of custody (notably in cases of separation, divorce or death of the spouse) allowing single parents to obtain a residence permit for their children. We also filed applications for legal aid with the court for litigation cases that we did not have the capacity to support. Finally, all of these procedures are accompanied by administrative formalities, the filing of briefs and pleadings.

For more details on the procedures we follow, please see our [2021 Annual Report](#). In particular, a diagram of the asylum procedure in Greece is available.



*From left to right: Eleni, Statha and Athina, the three Greek lawyers working with ELA, May 2022
Photo credit: Claire Didisheim*

Outreach activities

The association devotes an important part of its intervention to outreach activities, i.e. legal clinics and streetwork, as well as online contact tools. These activities are designed with the aim of facilitating exchanges with beneficiaries (and partners). In a territory such as Northern Greece, it can be difficult for people to move from an isolated camp to the city centre of Thessaloniki where most of the associations are located. In addition, the prohibitive cost of transport; health conditions; particular family circumstances or the risk of illegal refoulement are all factors that can hinder travel and contact.

16

legal clinics

From January to June 2022, our team regularly went to Diavata (20min from the city centre), Polykastro (1h from Thessaloniki) and Katerini (1h from Thessaloniki) to conduct legal consultations in our partners' community centres. These three centres are located near refugee camps. The legal consultations take place on average once per week. During these sessions, our team responds to new requests and ensures the follow-up of the beneficiaries of the association. Our team also went to Kavala (2h from Thessaloniki) and Lagkadikia (45min from Thessaloniki) to respond to occasional needs.

Our team attends a weekly food distribution in the suburbs of Thessaloniki to provide legal advice. Providing assistance at this specific meeting point is essential: it allows an excluded community to access information, in particular newly arrived asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers. For these undocumented applicants, going to the city centre can be dangerous: the risk of arrest, arbitrary detention and illegal refoulement is very high. Streetwork provides an opportunity to identify urgent cases requiring immediate attention.

23

streetwork

74

hotline requests

Since the launch of the project, ELA has created an hotline dedicated to displaced persons seeking legal assistance, from Monday to Friday, from 9am to 6pm. Asylum seekers can speak directly with a member of our team, if necessary with the assistance of an interpreter. After an initial assessment, the case is referred to a lawyer for further legal actions. As we have noticed an increase in the number of requests to our hotline, we have implemented a monitoring tool in March 2022.

From March to June 2022, we received 74 requests for legal assistance from asylum seekers mainly from Afghanistan (23%), Syria (19%), Iraq (12%) and Kurdistan (7%). Most of these applications were dealt with by our team on a long-term basis. It should be noted that most of these requests fall exactly within the scope of the association's work, demonstrating a good understanding and visibility of our action within the communities.

To facilitate exchanges and cooperation with other actors in the region, we have set up a referral form, accessible in English on ELA's website since the beginning of January 2022. In 6 months, we have received 41 referral requests, mainly from 9 international and local organisations. We managed to handle 73% of the cases referred, most of them concerning 1st instance (15%) and 2nd instance (39%) appeals as well as preparation for interviews (17%).

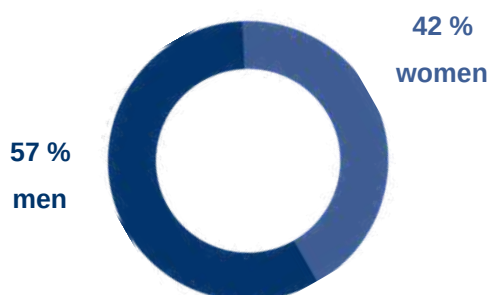
Unfortunately, our team was forced to refuse 11 referrals, which concerned 2nd instance appeals. Indeed, our budget dedicated to litigation at the Administrative Court of Appeal as well as our staffing levels do not allow us to support all the requests presented.

41

referrals

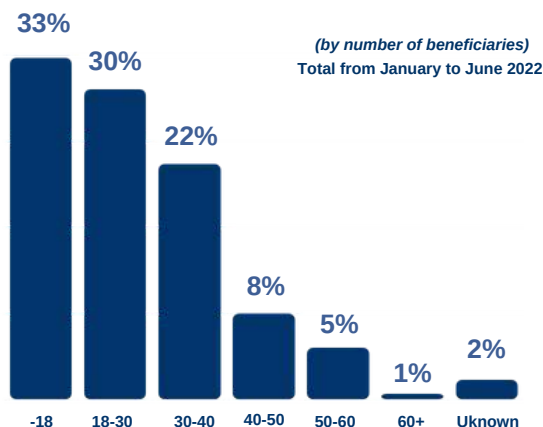
Demographic data

GENDRE



(by number of beneficiaries)
Total from January to June 2022

AGE



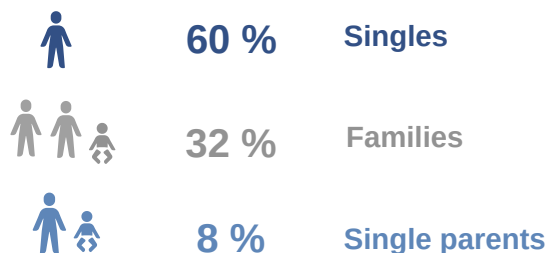
(by number of beneficiaries)
Total from January to June 2022

LOCATION IN GREECE



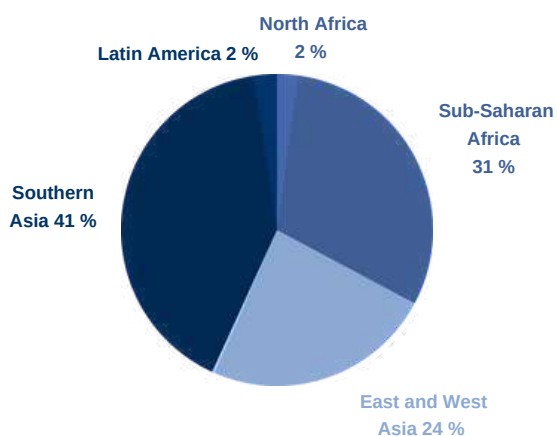
(by number of beneficiaries)
Total from January to June 2022

FAMILY SITUATION



(by number of cases)
Total from January to June 2022

28 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



TOP 5 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Afghanistan - 27 % | 4. Syria - 9 % |
| 2. Iraq - 10% | 5. DR Congo - 9 % |
| 3. Pakistan - 9 % | |

(by number of beneficiaries)
Total from January to June 2022

19 LANGUAGES SPOKEN

31% Farsi/Dari
17% Arabic
15% French

8% Urdu	2% Spanish
7% English	2% Kermanji
5% Lingala	5% other (Bengali, Pashto, Pourra, Soninké, Mandarin, Cousais, Hindi)
4% Sorani	
3% Somali	
2% Turkish	

(by number of beneficiaries)
Total from January to June 2022

Immersion in our action

"Eteri* is from Ivory Coast. At the age of 21 she was forced by her family to undergo Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as a tradition of her tribe (Yakuba). Due to the poor conditions in which the operation was performed, she contracted HIV/AIDS. When her family and tribe found out, she was stigmatized, discriminated against and marginalized. She couldn't work and she lost all her supportive network. She left her country for fear of persecution, as HIV-positive women in Ivory Coast may face. HIV-positive women are indeed considered a "social group" under the Refugee Convention. Eteri came to Greece to seek international protection. ELA assisted her during the procedure, first by preparing her for her asylum interview and later after she received a rejection decision. While acknowledging that she was indeed a victim of female genital mutilation and marginalisation as an HIV-positive woman, the asylum authorities considered that the events she referred to were not serious enough to constitute inhuman or degrading treatment. We have appealed this decision, which we believe does not reflect the severity and intensity of the threats Eteri may have faced in her country of origin."



Athina Kalogridi
Lawyer within ELA since October 2021

"At the beginning of February 2022, a group of Cuban citizens reached ELA to seek legal assistance. They flew nearly 10,000 kilometres from Cuba to Russia, aiming at accessing Greece by land after being forced to violently repress peaceful manifestations in their country of origin. Some of them were smuggled until the Greek border, whereas others claimed to have walked through Serbia and North Macedonia for days. The Cuban asylum seekers were kept in detention for months after being apprehended by the Greek police at the border. They were not informed about their rights and deprived of their mobile phones. Because of linguistic barriers, they could not understand their legal status and the reason they were kept in custody. ELA advocated for their rights and assisted them in preparing for their asylum interviews. Unfortunately, their claims were rejected on the grounds that North Macedonia is a safe third country for them. Indeed, since 20th December 2021, the Greek government considers North Macedonia a safe third country for people who "transited" there on their way to seek protection in Greece. In those instances, the Greek asylum authorities rejected their applications for asylum without even hearing the reasons they left Cuba. We appealed the rejections, asking for their claims for asylum to be examined properly in Greece."

Matteo Russo
Volunteer jurist within ELA since February 2022



"Myriam* is a young mother of Pakistani nationality. She contacted ELA for the first time last March but after an initial assessment, we understood that she was already accompanied by a lawyer and our ethics oblige us not to intervene in these circumstances. Myriam contacted us again in June following a second rejection of her asylum application and when she was also ordered to leave the accommodation she occupied. She is now without a lawyer. We met her in our offices with the help of an Urdu interpreter. This meeting enabled us to establish a relationship of trust with this woman and her two children, aged 3 and 1. We explained to her the reasons for the rejection decisions she had been subjected to and the next steps to be taken. Myriam will have to meet with doctors in order to obtain the necessary evidence to support her extreme vulnerability. The aim is to be able to submit a request for reexamination, which would this time be assessed correctly and on the basis of these elements. Our support has only just begun, but it is already very important: thanks to it, Myriam can once again access certain basic services such as food and nappies for her children."



Domitille Nicolet

Lawyer/project coordinator within ELA since September 2020

"Ali* and his family are Afghans, from the Hazara tribe. Decades ago, they were forced to flee Afghanistan into Iran, to escape persecution from the Talibans. In 2019, together with his two minor children, his elderly mother and his brother (who has special needs), Ali had to flee Iran due to the increasing discrimination and ill-treatment they were subjected to as Afghan refugees. They traveled to Turkey on foot but were deported twice to Iran by the Turkish authorities. In total, they stayed 6 months in Turkey and were arrested several times but never granted international protection, despite their obvious need for it. Upon every arrest, the Turkish police issued a return order to Afghanistan. Since the family had no legal documents, they couldn't exercise their rights nor cover their basic needs. After 8 attempts, the family ultimately managed to enter Greece and applied for international protection in March 2020. They were finally able to access basic services: accommodation, education for the children, healthcare and employment. Unfortunately, the family's application for international protection was rejected as inadmissible in August 2021. The Greek asylum authorities considered Turkey as a safe third country for them and ordered their readmission there. At ELA, we submitted an appeal against this decision which has disastrous consequences on their lives: it is depriving them of their rights, leaving them in legal limbo, undocumented and homeless, and Turkey has not accepted any readmissions for the past 2 years. We are also challenging the very notion that Turkey would be a safe place for them."

Efstathia Laina

Lawyer within ELA since July 2021



"Mary* is a 27 years old woman from Nigeria. She left her country in 2015 for Turkey after her life was threatened by religious extremists she claims had assassinated her sister. She arrived in Greece in 2016 on the island of Lesvos. From the moment she left Nigeria until she claimed asylum in Greece, Mary was a victim of sex trafficking. Sex trafficking occurs when a trafficker or smuggler exploits a person with force, fraud or coercion to make them perform commercial sex. Under pressure and threats from the traffickers and perpetrators of the abuses, Mary was too scared to mention these elements to the authorities during her asylum procedure. Her asylum application was then rejected in 1st and 2nd instance. When she came in contact with ELA, she had been undocumented for more than a year and even more vulnerable to all forms of abuse. She confided in our team and we assisted her in order to submit a subsequent asylum request, substantiated by the sexual exploitation she had been a victim of. Following the submission of those new elements to the authorities, her application was deemed admissible and examined on the merits. Mary was finally recognized as a refugee in June 2022 after 6 years in Greece and two asylum procedures. "



Eleni Papageorgiou
Lawyer within ELA since February 2021

"Abbas* is from Iraq. He arrived in Greece in 2016. Abbas is 56 years old, suffers from diabetes, hypertension and has a mass on his thyroid. His application for asylum was rejected on appeal but his file was referred to the Migration Department by the Appeal Committee. Indeed, his very worrying state of health (he has to undergo a surgical operation), coupled with the problematic situation in Iraq, renders him eligible for a special residence permit, issued for "humanitarian reasons". While waiting for his residence permit to be issued, Abbas is given a temporary permit. Then the COVID19 pandemic began. Abbas contacted ELA during a marauding trip in early 2022. He wants to understand why his provisional permit is no longer valid. We tell Abbas that unfortunately he will never receive his residence permit: he should have renewed his temporary permit, but never received the letter informing him of this because he is homeless. The deadline for renewal expired long ago. Worse, during the pandemic, the Greek government abolished this residence permit. Abbas becomes undocumented. He can be arrested and deported at any time. Legally, there is no recourse. We help him to understand the situation and inform him about his - little - options. We encourage him to submit a subsequent application, substantiated in particular by his worsening health problems. We refer him to a medical organisation that should help him obtain recent medical certificates. We meet with him every Tuesday to try to reach the asylum office's Skype line and submit his subsequent application - so far without success, as the asylum office is never available."

Claire Didisheim
Volunteer jurist within ELA from October 2021 to June 2022



Awareness-raising and advocacy activities

Publication of our first report on access to legal aid

Between July and December 2021, Equal Legal Aid conducted a major survey on access to legal aid in northern Greece for displaced persons. The aim of the survey was to assess access to legal aid in this region, by directly interviewing asylum seekers. We sought to find out whether they had access to legal aid, in what form it was provided (lawyer, legal adviser, international volunteer, etc.) and whether it met their needs. A total of 180 testimonies were collected. The survey revealed that almost one in two people had never had access to legal aid, although 95% of respondents considered it essential, necessary or useful.

In our [report](#), published in January 2022, we present the results of the survey and identify the causes of these difficulties of access. Finally, we propose recommendations to make legal aid accessible to all.

Greece must repeal the decision considering Turkey as a safe country

ELA and 39 other organisations active throughout Europe call for the immediate repeal of the ministerial decision of 7 June 2021, declaring Turkey a safe third country for Afghan, Syrian, Somali, Pakistani and Bangladeshi nationals. This petition, launched on 7 June 2022, has already collected more than 1200 signatures.

Go [here](#) to sign the petition!

Meeting with ASGI

In June, our team received the delegation of the Association for Juridical Studies on Migration (ASGI) for a field visit to Thessaloniki. The purpose of this visit was to continue a legal research work undertaken in 2016 and 2017 in Greece, concerning the effects of the EU-Turkey agreement on the Greek asylum system and which resulted in the publication of 4 studies by ASGI. A new report is currently under consideration. ASGI's lawyers wanted to meet with us in order to enrich their knowledge and expertise on detention and readmission procedures, accelerated and border procedures, admissibility procedures and generally access to asylum.

Thessaloniki Pro Bono Lawyers' Meeting

ELA initiated two meetings of pro bono lawyers working in the non-profit sector in the region of Thessaloniki, which took place at the association's premises in March and June 2022. Given the limited resources (human and financial) of our structures, we have indeed noticed an increased need for support in appeals, which calls for a better coordination of legal actors among themselves. These meetings are also a forum for exchanging practices and difficulties encountered by lawyers, as well as for sharing information, strategy and case law.

In addition to these discussions, ELA has started a mapping of the legal structures and their capacities in order to better distribute the cases between them.

Only about 15 lawyers are currently working pro bono in Thessaloniki.



Meeting with pro bono lawyers of Thessaloniki in ELA's offices, June 2022.
Photo credit : Farhad Alizadeh

Some updates from ELA

Consolidating links with our partners

The first part of the year was marked by the strengthening of our links with many partners who participate in and support our project.

From January to June 2022, we had the pleasure of receiving visits from 3 of our partners and supporters: the **Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD)-Terre Solidaire**, the international law firm **DLA Piper** and the **Fund for Global Human Rights**. The objective of these field visits was to better understand the context of our intervention and the challenges presented by northern Greece, and more particularly the access of asylum seekers to legal aid. The visit of CCFD-Terre Solidaire came at the end of an exploratory mission organised by Echanges et Partenariats, which resulted in the deployment of a volunteer jurist, Maëlys Guillaume, within ELA from October 2021 to March 2022.



Conference in Jordan by the Fund for Global Human Rights, March 2022

In March, ELA Director Juliette Malfaisan participated in a regional conference organised in Jordan by the Fund for Global Human Rights on the **situation and rights of displaced persons in the Euro-Mediterranean region**. This event brought together 14 associations and non-governmental organisations working in support of displaced persons in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Greece and the Balkans. This conference was an opportunity for inspiring meetings, debates and moments of reflection on access to rights in times of pandemic.

In May, we received a visit from **Science Po Paris students** participating in the **collective project** launched in collaboration and at the initiative of ELA in October 2021. The project focuses on the study of **obstacles related to the digitalisation of the asylum procedure in Greece**. Under the guidance of ELA, the students conducted research and numerous interviews with Greek civil society actors. This field trip was the culmination of six months of intensive work and was made possible thanks to the support of the Midi research collective. During the few days spent in Thessaloniki, Meredith, Lara and Christina were able to deepen and finalise their analysis in view of the publication of an analysis report in September 2022.

Finally, in June, our association was awarded a prize by the **Medici law firm** in Paris in the framework of a call for proposals. This call aimed to promote charitable initiatives fighting discrimination. The award ceremony was held in Paris on 16 June. We are very honoured and grateful that our actions in favour of the rights of displaced persons have received such support and thank once again the Medici for Equality fund.



Award ceremony of the Medici for Equality fund held in Paris on 16 June 2022

Trainings and workshops

Practical training for volunteer interpreters

In March, Farhad Alizadeh, cultural mediator and Farsi/Dari interpreter at ELA, organised and conducted training sessions for our team of volunteer interpreters in order to share practical advice and recommendations with them. The role of the interpreter is absolutely fundamental in legal consultations. In addition to the legal interpretation itself, the interpreter also has the often delicate role of reassuring and explaining complex concepts to our beneficiaries, as well as explaining and bridging the linguistic and cultural gaps that may arise during the consultations.

Practical training on the application for legal aid for the social workers of one of our partner

In April, Athina Kalogridi, a lawyer with ELA, gave a training session for the social workers of a community centre. As our organisation is not able to take on all the requests relating to 2nd instance appeals, we wanted to make more use of the free legal aid that can be granted at the Court of Appeal. This assistance is provided free of charge by lawyers from the local bar association and is financed by the Greek State. It is, however, contingent on the applicant's financial resources and must be granted by the judge after a formal application has been lodged with the Court's secretariat. This application, in Greek, is quite technical and time-consuming, and can in no way be filled in by the applicant himself. However, access to a lawyer depends on it when no organisation has the human and financial capacity to support the case on appeal. In order to lighten the workload of our team, we wanted to offer practical training to the social workers of local associations so that they themselves could gather the necessary documents and file the application. This training was the first - we hope - of many of the sort!

Practical training on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo for our team

In May, our team received specialised training on the geopolitical and social situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This training was given by a person working at Médecins Sans Frontières and one of our Congolese interpreters. In addition to providing our team (and that of Mobile Info Team, invited for the occasion) with a general overview of the situation in DRC, this training was an opportunity to question our two speakers on more specific issues related to the cases supported by ELA, such as the sexual trafficking of women for example.



*Training for volunteer interpreters in ELA's office, March 2022.
Photo credit: Emy*

Conferences

14 February 2022: "Voices of the invisible: testimonies of human rights violations in northern Greece"

In February, Statha Laina, a lawyer at ELA, was invited to participate in this online conference, organised by the students of Sciences Po Paris. It brought together a panel of asylum seekers and refugees, artists and humanitarian workers and activists involved in northern Greece. They were invited to testify about the human rights violations they had experienced or witnessed. The aim of the conference was to shed light on the situation in the region, which has been largely overlooked, and to amplify the voices of those who live there.

16 March 2022: "The judicial professions in the face of the reception crisis in Europe"

In March, Domitille Nicolet, lawyer and project coordinator at ELA, was invited to participate in this conference organised by the students of the association of the Masters in Cultures and Judicial Professions of the University Jean Moulin Lyon 3. The aim of this conference was to raise awareness about the situation of asylum seekers in Greece and in Europe, and more particularly to present the work of the association and its lawyers.

Strengthening our presence on social medias

In 2022, ELA continued to work on its presence and the visibility of its actions on social medias.

Here are some of the results achieved, especially on the Instagram platform: in one year, our audience has increased by 63.9%, visits to our profile have increased by 107% and the number of people following ELA's account has increased by 343%.

It is also interesting to observe the geographical distribution of our audience (graph on the right).

Finally, the opening rate of our bi-monthly newsletter is 50%.

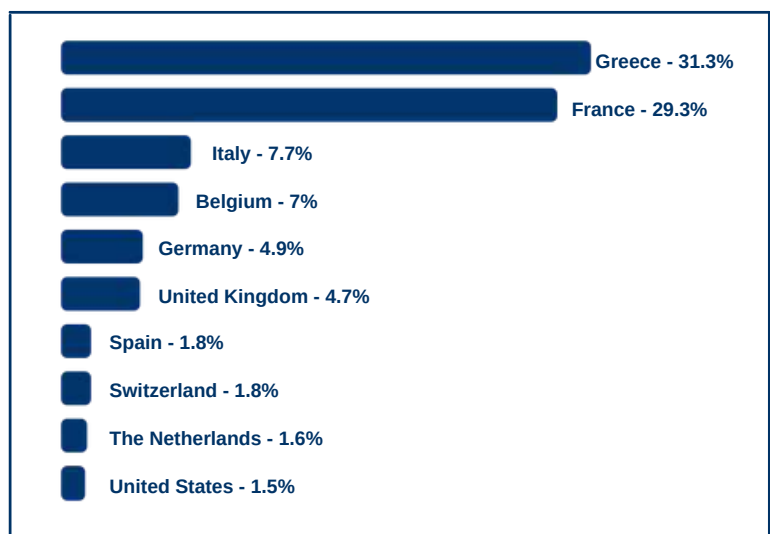


Photo: Matteo and Statha during a weekly meeting, May 2022. Photo credit: Claire Didisheim

Some feedbacks from our beneficiaries

"I finished the interview and my wife just came in for the interview. Thank you very much for helping me and letting you know everything that happened in the interview."

"I received my answer today and got a 3 year acceptance. Thank you very much, you worked so hard for me."

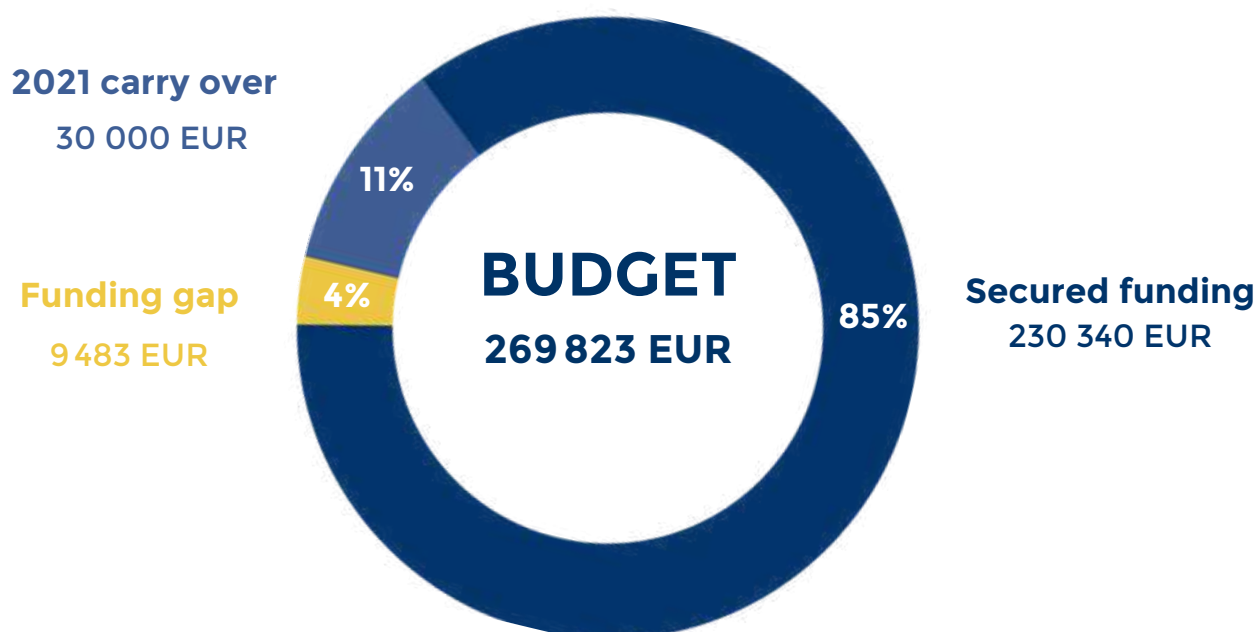
"Je manque les mots pour vous remercier."

"I've got an asylum card again. Thank you very much. God bless you."

"Hello, we had the interview today and everything went very well and they told us that we will receive the decision in maximum two, the interviewer told my husband to not worry, she will help him and everything will be fine also the interpreter told us that we did well and from the interviewer comments he was sure that we will have a positive decision, the question were the same as before. Thank you very much for your help."

"I was interviewed for almost 3 hours. She asked me something that you and I practiced together."

Funding picture in 2022



In 2022, many partner entities have decided to renew the support and trust they had shown towards the project carried by ELA in 2021: **the Gratitude Foundation, the Lucq Espérance Foundation, the PAM Foundation, the UMPT Foundation, the Inkermann Fund, Secours Catholique, Aid Hoc, Choose Love, BNP Paribas, DLA Piper and the Bars of Marseille and Lyon** are among them.

Alongside them, new donors have decided to support our project in 2022: **SolidariTee, the Fondation du Grand-Orient de France, Safe Passage Foundation, Medici for Equality, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, Humanity Now, ProjectElpida and the Essonne Bar Association.**

We also received **25 individual donations** through our HelloAsso page or directly to the association's bank account.

We thank all those who continue to believe in our fight and support our project in 2022!

SUPPORT OUR ACTION

Financial report

(January - June 2022)

Budget line	Provisional budget	Costs (jan-june 22)	% of absorption
1. Personnel costs			
1.1. Permanent staff			
Executive director/lawyer (FR) - Full time	30 000	14 204	47 %
Project coordinator/lawyer (FR) - Full-time	33 600	16 010	48 %
Registered Greek lawyer (GR) - Full-time (1)	25 200	12 600	50 %
Registered Greek lawyer (GR) - Full-time (2)	20 350	9 250	46 %
Registered Greek lawyer (GR) - Part-time (3)	21 150	8 250	39 %
Fundraising & Donors relations (FR) - 80%	25 200	11 165	44 %
Interpreter Farsi, Dari (GR) - Full-time	25 200	12 600	50 %
1.2. Volunteer staff			
Volunteer Interpreters	2 400	1 161	48 %
Volunteers subsistence expenses	5 400	5 344	90 %
Reimbursement of travel expenses	800	139	17 %
Sub-total personnel costs	189 300	90 722	48 %
2. Operating costs			
2.1. External consultants			
Accountant (GR)	5 400	0	0 %
Accountant (FR)	4 800	2704	56 %
Lawyer (GR)	2 000	0	0 %
Certified translation (GR)	1 000	0	0 %
External financial audit	5 000	0	0 %
Consultancy: Communication	11 704	5 320	45 %
ISO certification	5 000	0	0 %
2.2. Office costs			
Rent	4 560	2 596	57 %
Utilities (electricity & water)	3 000	1 126	38 %
Phone/Internet subscriptions	1 800	489	27 %
Insurance costs	1 800	0	0 %
Office supplies	1 800	1 346	75 %
Banking costs (FR)	180	52	29 %
Banking costs (GR)	180	15	8 %
Other association's fees	1 800	640	36 %
Office design, equipment & appliances	2 000	499	25 %
Domain and hosting services	50	14	28 %
Sub-total operating costs	52 074	14 800	28 %
3. Specific mission costs			
Travel expenses	2 400	1 180	49 %
Representation fees	12 000	6 749	56 %
Sub-total specific mission costs	14 400	7 930	55 %
DIRECT COSTS OF THE PROJECT	255 774	113 452	44 %
Emergency cash reserve (5%)	12 789	0	0 %
TOTAL COSTS OF THE PROJECT	268 563	113 452	42 %



Legal clinic in Katerini. Photo: Claire Didisheim

Activity Report January - June 2022

Equal Legal Aid
Non-profit association in accordance
with the French Law of 1901
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