



# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

LEGAL AID TO DISPLACED PERSONS  
THESSALONIKI, NORTHERN GREECE



*Providing legal aid to displaced persons  
Defending the right to asylum*

# Summary

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For any questions: [contact@equallegalaid.org](mailto:contact@equallegalaid.org)

# Who we are

The only organisation providing full-spectrum pro bono legal aid in northern Greece from first registration to the highest level of appeal.

Founded in 2019 and based in Thessaloniki, ELA provides free legal services to displaced people across northern Greece at every stage of the asylum procedure. ELA's team of lawyers and interpreters has provided long-term legal support to 1,700+ asylum seekers from 53 countries since 2020.

ELA's operations are based in Thessaloniki, the administrative capital of Central Macedonia. Its central location provides easier access to the region's 15 refugee camps.



## OUR VALUES



### Independence

We are politically and financially independent of any government, ideology, economic interest or religion. Our independence guarantees our freedom of expression, action, and resilience.



### Solidarity

We believe that European civil society must unequivocally uphold the right to asylum and the dignity of displaced people.



### Emancipation

We inform people of their rights so they can make decisions, participate actively, and rebuild their futures independently.



### Quality

Pro bono does not mean second-rate. We maintain professional standards through training, recruitment, and supervision.



### Inclusion

Our programme is unconditional and only limited by our resources. Our "open door" policy is combined with outreach to make our services accessible to as many people as possible.



### Continuity

A stable core team, diligent financial planning and complementary services ensure uninterrupted action since 2020.

## ORGANISATION DETAILS

Name	Equal Legal Aid (ELA)	Founded	2019
Status	Non-profit (loi 1901)	Registration number	W595035578
Headquarters	Roubaix, France	Operations base	Thessaloniki, Greece
Website	<a href="http://equallegalaid.org">equallegalaid.org</a>	Email	<a href="mailto:contact@equallegalaid.org">contact@equallegalaid.org</a>

### BANK DETAILS

IBAN: FR76 1027 8027 3900 0529 6060 137 - BIC: CMCIFR2A

# The context of our work

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## **The right to asylum in Europe: the slow death**

Across Europe, the right to asylum is being undermined in principle and in practice. The 2024 European Pact on Migration and Asylum is symptomatic of a clear step backwards: intended to redistribute the burden of migration more fairly and to streamline asylum procedures, its provisions go much further. They enshrine at European level many of the dissuasive measures already applied in Greece, with documented and dramatic consequences. Greece has long served as a testing ground for asylum restriction measures subsequently adopted at European level, a dynamic that sharply intensified in 2025.

## **Still a gateway to Europe**

Like Italy and Spain, Greece's geographical location makes it one of the main gateways to Europe for people seeking protection. In 2025, 61,629 asylum applications were lodged in Greece, a decrease from the previous year, far from the alarmist rhetoric of government officials.<sup>1</sup> Afghans, Syrians and Somalis accounted for most arrivals; populations with clear and well-documented protection needs.

During the year, a significant new migration route emerged: Arrivals of Sudanese asylum seekers via the central Mediterranean route to Crete increased sharply, although the island has no adequate reception infrastructure.<sup>2</sup>

The Safe Third Country mechanism - designating Türkiye as a safe country of return for Afghan, Syrian and Somali nationals - continued to be applied despite having been annulled by the Plenary of the Greek Council of State for inadequate legal reasoning. Before the ruling's publication, the government adopted a new, identical designation, which is subject to new legal proceedings since June 2025.<sup>3</sup> This created a cycle of legal limbo that impacted thousands of people again throughout 2025.

## **A system designed to deter and deport**

Since its election in 2019, the party in power in Greece, New Democracy, has been using crude and brutal methods to reduce the number of migrants at all costs. The surgical pursuit of this objective involves using every possible means:

harassment of asylum seekers, detention in unsuitable facilities, bureaucratic obstruction, deportations, criminalisation of solidarity, extreme militarisation of the border with Türkiye, and mass illegal refoulements. Institutional and police violence in Greece has reached a critical point, and a climate of fear has crept into migrant communities and civil society.

2025 saw a stark escalation in the hostility directed at asylum seekers and those working in solidarity with them. Two major developments once more set Greece apart as one of the harshest and most punitive environments for asylum seekers in Europe, and as a preview of what the implementation of the Pact now permits across the EU.

On 11 July 2025, the Greek Parliament suspended the right to apply for asylum for all those arriving by sea from North Africa for three months.<sup>4</sup> People arriving via this route - primarily Sudanese, Eritrean, Somali and Egyptian nationals - were transferred to detention centres on the Greek mainland and held in conditions documented by multiple monitoring bodies as violating human dignity.<sup>5</sup> The ban was lifted in October 2025 but many asylum seekers were still detained at the time of writing this report.

In September 2025, the Greek parliament adopted a legislation that fundamentally altered the legal position of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. The law criminalises irregular stay, making it a criminal offence punishable by a minimum of two years' imprisonment, as well as fines raised to a minimum of €5,000. The legislation explicitly references the European Commission's proposed Return Regulation as its model: Greece adopted its provisions before they had been agreed at European level.<sup>6</sup>

## **Rights at risk**

Accessing asylum remained an ordeal in 2025:

- The online platform for submitting asylum applications remained unreliable, generating systemic delays and obstructing access at the registration stage. Vulnerabilities were inconsistently recognised.
- Police called on asylum seekers during the

exercise of appeal rights; identity checks targeted racialised individuals; asylum seekers were pressured to sign voluntary return agreements; the Ministry circulated an official document threatening immediate return for those without a "valid" asylum claim.

- Access to legal representation at appeal (formally mandatory) remained difficult.
- Asylum seekers faced degrading conditions in overcrowded refugee camps, affecting their health and dignity. Access to drinking water and food remained grossly inadequate; financial assistance of €75 per person/month, funded by the EU and suspended since May 2024, was not reinstated.<sup>7</sup>
- Interpretation services at asylum offices and in reception facilities, which collapsed in 2024, were not reliably restored in 2025. Interruptions continued throughout the year, with the same consequences: inability to submit applications, procedural delays, barriers to accessing healthcare, and issues in identifying vulnerabilities.

### **Collapsing support infrastructure**

In 2025, organisations supporting displaced persons again faced a further reduction in subsidies and capacity. This decline was driven by the emergence of new humanitarian crises, the current inflationary context, but mostly political hostility towards civil society.

In January 2025, the deep cuts to USAID impacted the civil society ecosystem worldwide. Simultaneous cuts in international solidarity programmes across Europe amplified the shock, whose effects on the sector have yet to subside. Worse: Funding contracted precisely when needs were growing and the capacity to respond was shrinking.

For years, governments across Europe have withdrawn from the direct provision of social services, delegating it to civil society organisations, which absorb the cost at a fraction of what state provision would require. The funding crisis of 2025 exposed the fragility of this arrangement with particular violence. In Greece, the mechanism takes its most extreme form: the state receives EU funds specifically earmarked for

the provision of reception services and systematically fails to deliver them, leaving civil society to fill the void with private donations and grants. It then proceeds to restrict their access to funding and their freedom to operate.

### **The urgent need to support exiles in Greece**

The infrastructure that once surrounded displaced persons in northern Greece has largely disappeared. The withdrawal of organisations providing legal and humanitarian support in northern Greece accelerated in 2025. Several organisations shut projects and offices in the region, including the local UNHCR office. At the end of 2025, only ten lawyers working for non-profit organisations remained active in legal assistance in asylum cases across the whole of northern Greece, a region of 65,000km<sup>2</sup> hosting over 10,000 asylum seekers in refugee camps.

The deterioration in living conditions and the systematic violation of human rights,<sup>8</sup> despite countless interventions from civil society organisations and international monitoring bodies, require unflinching vigilance and a relentless response.

These practices and policies are not merely attacks on the right to asylum, but flagrant violations of procedural rights and guarantees - including the right to a lawyer, to clear and comprehensible information in a known language, to an effective remedy, and to a fair trial. These repeated violations illustrate the absolute contempt of the authorities towards displaced people, the irresponsible management of European public funds, and the arrogance of a government that has consistently violated European and international law since 2019. These violations are part of a systematic escalation of abuses, often irreparable and always committed with impunity.

In an increasingly restricted civic space and in the face of incessant attacks on people in exile at sea and on land, the work of organisations like ELA is essential.

1. Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum, annual data 2025.
2. RSA, *Crete-Gavdos 2025: Fourfold increase in refugee arrivals and absence of state planning*, February 2026.
3. RSA, *Council of State annuls the designation of Turkey as a safe third country*, March 2025.
4. Greek Parliament, amendment to Law 5218/2025, Art. 79, 11 July 2025. See also Focus on: the asylum ban.
5. ECtHR, interim measures decisions of 14 August and 29 August 2025; RSA, *Suspension of asylum in Greece: detention, uncertainty, and rights violations*, November 2025.
6. Greek Parliament, *Reform of the Framework and Procedures for the Return of Third-Country Nationals*, adopted 3 September 2025. RSA, *Criminalisation of "illegal stay" in Greece*, February 2026.
7. Joint statement, Mobile Info Team, I Have Rights, ELA, Refugee Legal Support and ASF France, 14 March 2025.
8. UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, joint communication to the Government of Greece, November 2025.

# Our impact

In 2025, ELA provided some form of legal support to **1,583 people** across northern Greece.

## 671 asylum seekers, from 46 countries, were provided long-term legal support

Asylum seekers for whom ELA opened a case and provided sustained assistance: multiple consultations, case preparation, appeals, and representation. These are the participants whose data appears throughout this report.

## 912 asylum seekers were provided short-term support, as part of ELA's outreach programme

Asylum seekers who received targeted legal information through the hotline or at a legal clinic, typically a single exchange that addressed immediate questions or concerns.

### OUR WORK IN NUMBERS - 2025

#### ACCESS TO ASYLUM

Legal clinics held	44
Hotline requests handled	900
People assisted during clinics	235

#### LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Asylum seekers assisted	671
Procedures active in 2025	491
Consultations provided	1003

#### LEGAL REPRESENTATION

Interview preparations	368
Appeals before Greek Courts	121
Lawyers deployed	11

#### ADVOCACY

Publications and reports	7
Newsletters published	6
GBV cases supported	27

Since 2020

ELA has assisted 1,700+ people from 53 countries, answered 2,500+ enquiries on its hotline, and lodged 247 appeals and annulment requests.

**5**  
years  
anniversary

# The participants\*

671 people provided with long-term support in 2025

from 46 countries, speaking 31 languages

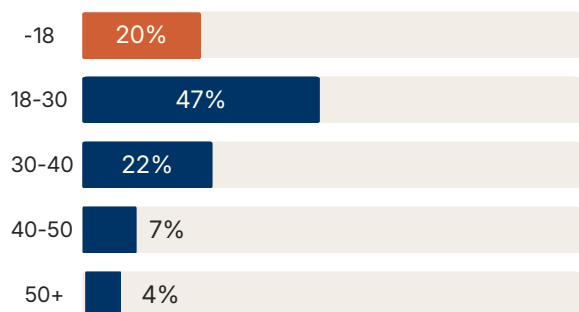
## GENDER



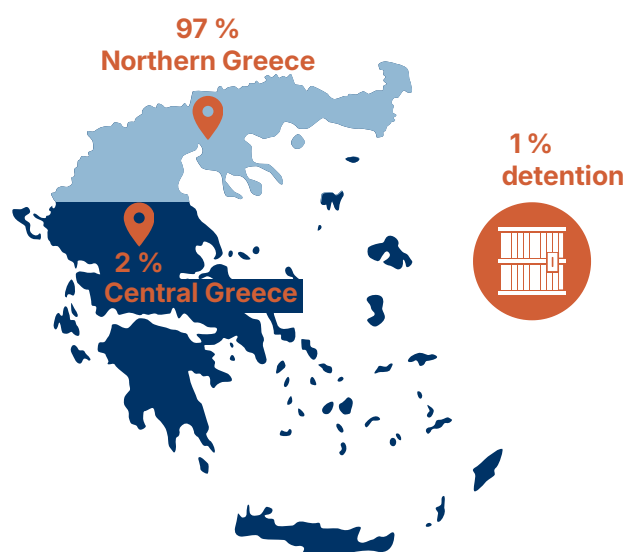
## FAMILY STATUS



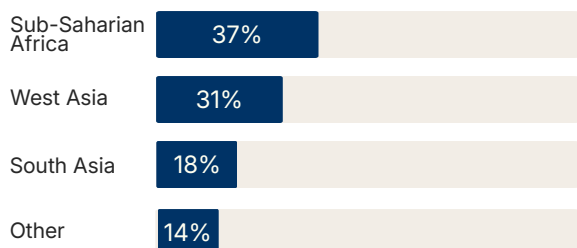
## AGE DISTRIBUTION



## LOCATION IN GREECE



## ORIGIN BY REGION



## TOP COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

1.	Syria	19%
2.	Afghanistan	12%
3.	Sierra Leone	10%
4.	Iraq	10%
5.	Somalia	7%
6.	Sudan	6%

+ 40 other countries

## TOP LANGUAGES SPOKEN

1.	Arabic	36%
2.	Farsi/Dari	16%
3.	English	10%
4.	French	8%
5.	Somali	7%
6.	Krio	5%

+ 25 other languages

\*Data collected from January to December 2025, broken down by participants.

# 2025 highlights *in Greece and in Europe*

- Jan. 7** • **Greece condemned by the ECHR for illegal refoulement**  
The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) orders Greece to pay 20,000€ in compensation to the victim of an illegal pushback to Türkiye. This is a landmark judgement: the first ruling to directly sanction a harmful and deadly practice documented for years by civil society.
- Feb.** • **New Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum appointed**  
Makis Vouridis is appointed as the new minister of Migration. With strong links with the far-right movement, his appointment signals a further hardening of migration policy at the highest level.
- Mar-Apr.** • **Türkiye as a "Safe Third Country" - decision annulled, then reinstated**  
The Greek Council of State annuls the designation of Türkiye as a Safe Third Country for specific nationalities, reiterating the judgement of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) dated 4 October 2024. Weeks later, on 9 April 2025, the Ministry of Migration (re)designates Türkiye as a safe third country for the same nationalities in a decision contradicting both the Greek Council of State and the CJEU.
- June** • **June 2025: Second Minister of Migration appointed in four months**  
Thanos Plevris replaces Makis Vouridis as the new Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum. A prominent figure of the far right, Mr. Plevris is known for his openly Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric, as well as dehumanising language. He has publicly endorsed harsh border practices, even going so far as to justify migrant deaths in the name of "security."
- July 9** • **Asylum ban imposed on people arriving by boat from North Africa**  
In response to an increase in boat arrivals on the island of Crete, the Greek Parliament suspends asylum procedures for all people arriving by boat from North Africa, for three months, effectively preventing asylum seekers newly arrived from applying for asylum. Shortly afterwards, ELA sees a +400% surge in detention-related requests on its hotline. A new camp is set up in Sintiki and holds over 900 people, against an official capacity of 733.
- August 18** • **ECtHR issues interim measures against deportations of people detained under asylum ban**  
The ECtHR issues interim measures decisions forbidding the Greek government from deporting eight refugees from Sudan who arrived in Crete in July 2025.
- August 25** • **Greek Government threatens with tighter NGO registry rules**  
The Ministry of Migration threatens civil society with tighter requirements for registration in the official NGO registry. In these plans, any organisation that publicly criticises Greece's migration policies or takes legal action against the state, would risk being removed from the official registry, and barred from accessing reception facilities.
- Sept. 3** • **New Greek law criminalises "illegal stay"**  
The Hellenic Parliament adopts a new draconian law criminalising the stay of undocumented asylum seekers. It introduces prison sentences of 2 to 5 years, fines up to €10,000, and extends detention to 24 months. The law provides for the accelerated execution of deportation orders and introduced electronic monitoring (ankle bracelets). Human rights organisations - including UNHCR, and the Union of Administrative Judges - all condemn it as violating EU and international law.
- Nov. 21** • **UN Special Rapporteur raises alarm on NGO targeting**  
The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders sends a communication to the Greek government expressing concern about officials targeting NGOs working with asylum seekers.
- Dec. 18** • **The EU adopts first EU list of safe countries of origin**  
The Council of the EU and the European Parliament have now agreed on the first EU-wide list of safe countries of origin, incl. Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, India, Kosovo\*, Morocco and Tunisia. Applicants for international protection from these countries will be far less likely to receive any type of protection within the EU, as these countries are presumed to be generally 'safe', regardless of individual circumstances, background, and claims.

# Access to asylum and outreach

Since 2023, neither the Greek authorities nor any international organisations have provided legal aid inside refugee camps. In a region comprising 15 camps spread across 65,000 km<sup>2</sup> and hosting approximately 10,000 asylum seekers, ELA is one of the only organisations involved in outreach activities.

These activities aim to reduce physical and social barriers to accessing information and make legal assistance available more broadly. Our outreach comprises a hotline available every day from 9 am to 6 pm, regular legal clinics close to refugee camps, and a streamlined referral pathway.

## WHERE WE WORK



## WHY IS OUTREACH ESSENTIAL

- Most refugee camps are far from cities and not served by public transport. Asylum seekers are isolated and cannot reach services.
- In asylum procedures, deadlines are short. Asylum seekers need access to timely information and support, to safeguard their fundamental rights.
- Rejected applicants without valid documents risk arrest, criminalisation and pushback. Outreach is the only viable model to guarantee access to asylum and legal remedies.

## *Deliver quality legal assistance, at the right time, in the right place.*

Outreach activities constitute the cornerstone of ELA's programme and the condition upon which all other services depend. The displaced people we support are, in the vast majority, unable to access legal services independently. They reside in reception facilities that are geographically isolated, poorly served by public transport, and increasingly cut off from the information and support networks that would allow them to navigate the asylum procedure with any degree of autonomy.

In this context, ELA's presence in the field - at distribution points on the outskirts of Thessaloniki, in community centres in Polykastro, Kavala, Lagkadikia and Ioannina - is central to our mandate. The regularity and reliability of that presence, built over five years of sustained engagement with local partners and communities, is what makes it possible for the most isolated and vulnerable applicants to access legal assistance. Without it, a significant portion of the people who reach us each year would have no realistic pathway to legal support of any kind.

### NORTHERN GREECE

**65,000 km<sup>2</sup>**

A vast territory the size of Belgium and Luxembourg combined

**10,000+**

Asylum seekers in camps, half of Greece refugee population

**15**

Reception facilities (refugee camps)

## 2025 IN NUMBERS

### HOTLINE

**900** requests

+7% vs 2024

### LEGAL CLINICS

**44** sessions

in 5 locations

### PARTICIPANTS

**235** people met during clinics

26% Afghans, 18% Sudanese, 18% Syrians

### DURING THE ASYLUM BAN - JUL. TO OCT. 2025

**+400%** surge in detention-related requests received by ELA, reflecting the ongoing crisis.

## REVIEW OF 2025

In 2025, outreach activities have become more crucial but also more challenging. During the year, we had to make the difficult decision to reduce the number of legal clinics we were able to attend due to administrative constraints. Despite these hurdles, our team attended 44 legal clinics in 5 locations. During the legal clinics, our team met and informed over 200 people and saw a stark increase in attendance at key community centres. This surge reflects the feedback shared by participants, who have been signaling shortcoming in information provision inside the same nearby camps.

### NOTABLE SHIFT IN 2025

**+60%** increase in requests for interview preparations

Over 75% of these requests were taken up by our team for further, long-term support - the highest conversion rate we have recorded so far.

### REQUESTS BEYOND OUR CAPACITY IN 2025

**12%** of requests within our scope had to be turned down due to capacity.

In most cases, those people were unlikely to find a lawyer elsewhere.

In 2025, 12% of requests that fell within ELA's scope had to be turned down due to capacity constraints. In most cases, those people had no realistic alternative. This figure is not anecdotal: It is the second year in a row that our team has to turn down requests fitting our scope for capacity reasons. This figure represents a documented, unmet legal need in a region where the consequences of going unrepresented are dire and can lead to deportation, detention, or illegal refoulement.

The most impactful factor in the handling of requests for 2025 has without a doubt been the imposition of an asylum ban in the summer of 2025. This led to a dramatic surge in requests around detention and legal assistance from people affected by the ban (+400%). This coupled with the novelty of the action and the lack of a clear pathway offered by the Government, the inhuman conditions in which people were detained in and the lack of service and information provided to them meant a very intense couple of months for our team both in terms of capacity as well as well-being.

### WHO REACHED OUT TO US IN 2025

**17%** Syrians

-11% vs 2024

**8%** Afghans

+31% vs 2024

**8%** Sudanese

+166% vs 2024

**6%** Egyptians

+157% vs 2024

Requests from Sudanese asylum seekers increased significantly in 2025, a surge directly linked to the Sudan civil war but also to the asylum ban affecting people arriving from North Africa.

# The 2025 asylum ban

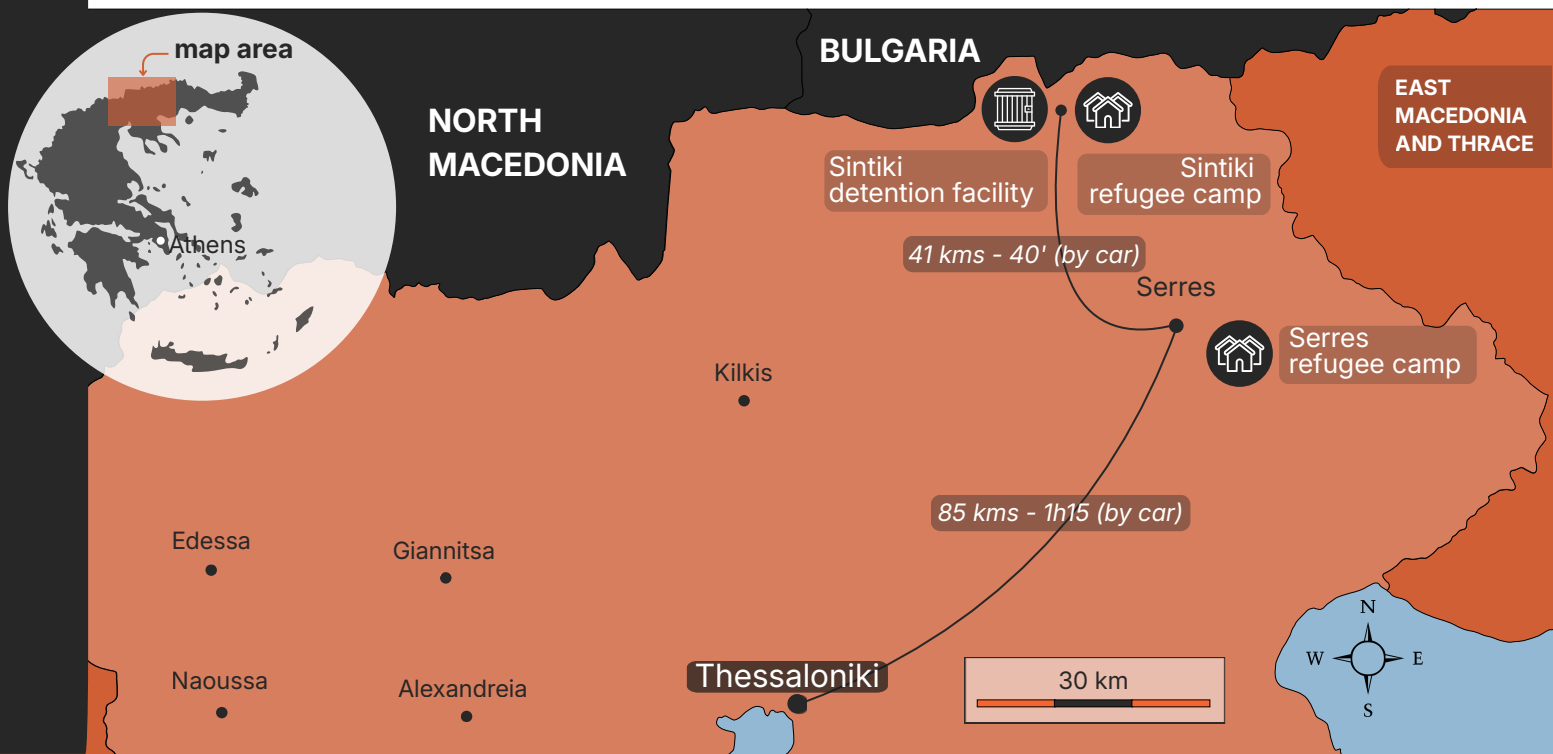
In July 2025, Greece suspended access to asylum for all people seeking protection, arriving by boat from North Africa, in practice affecting arrivals on Crete. A new detention camp was established to detain those affected by the ban until it was finally lifted in October 2025. The situation was largely unmonitored during the three months of the ban and well after it was lifted, leading to severe human rights violations.

- July 11** • **The Greek Parliament adopts a three-month suspension of asylum registration**  
The suspension affects people seeking protection, arriving by boat (mostly to Crete and Gavdos island), from North Africa, who should be deported immediately without their asylum applications being registered. A special detention facility is established within the refugee camp of Sintiki.  
Overall, 2,000 people were affected by the 3-month ban, deprived of the possibility to apply for asylum and detained. This new detention facility consistently held over 900 people during the suspension period, despite an official capacity of 733. Serious violations of fundamental rights have been documented, including arbitrary detention and lack of access to legal assistance.
- Oct.** • **The asylum ban is lifted but human rights violation persists**  
Asylum seekers affected by the ban remain detained in the special Sintiki facility, after the measure is lifted. Their asylum applications are processed under a fast-track procedure which undermine effective access to asylum and legal remedies. They are invited to register with only one or two days' notice, and are not given adequate information about the procedure or access to legal counselling. Shortly afterwards, rejection decisions start to be issued in large numbers, together with new detention orders. But most detainees don't have access to legal aid.

The Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum repeatedly argued that suspending asylum applications would reduce the number of asylum seekers arriving in Crete. However, more than 20,000 people arrived in Crete in 2025 alone (before, during and after the ban), proving that suspending the right to asylum does not act as a deterrent. The EU Commission refrained from publicly criticising the ban, instead backing the Greek government's assertion that arrivals from Libya constituted an 'exceptional situation'. This stance contrasts sharply with the EU Commission's swift infringement proceedings against Hungary for implementing similar measures.

This is the second time the Greek state has imposed an asylum ban within its borders, following an initial ban in March 2020. Greece is once again at the forefront of the EU's most restrictive policy implementation, using exceptional measures to derogate from regular asylum law.

The 2025 asylum ban sets another dangerous precedent, as suspending the right to asylum constitutes a clear violation of the international and EU asylum framework. To this day, the Sintiki detention camp remains in operation despite criticism from human rights actors.



# Representation and defense

In 2025, Greece's asylum system remained one of the most hostile in Europe. Successive legal reforms in recent years have made the asylum procedure increasingly complex and restrictive. These reforms have created a system in which procedural obstacles routinely prevent people from exercising their right to asylum. The barriers faced by asylum seekers are deeply entrenched, with additional obstacles accumulating over time. Asylum seekers are trapped in prolonged legal uncertainty, and in some cases are entirely prevented from having their asylum claims meaningfully examined. Most are exposed to extreme and inhumane living conditions in facilities that resemble places of detention rather than reception centres. Ultimately, many are denied effective access to international protection.

Consequently, it is virtually impossible to navigate the Greek asylum procedure without a lawyer. Yet legal assistance has almost disappeared in northern Greece. Although Greek law provides for free legal aid at the appeal stage and during court proceedings, systemic shortcomings severely undermine its effectiveness. In the absence of effective free legal aid, asylum seekers must rely on private lawyers or NGOs. However, in northern Greece, where more than 10,000 asylum seekers reside, only five non-profit organisations remain active in providing legal assistance. Together, they employ around ten lawyers — the lowest number since 2015. Three of these lawyers work with ELA. Given this limited capacity, only a small proportion of rejected applicants can access legal remedies, leaving the majority without meaningful representation and redress.

## THE COLLAPSE OF LEGAL SUPPORT IN NORTHERN GREECE

Lawyers providing legal aid in non-profit org. (end of 2025)

**10**

for the whole region

Asylum seekers in northern Greece

**10,000+**

half of Greece's asylum seekers, living in refugee camps

Major organisations closed or withdrawn in 2025

**3+**

incl. UNHCR's local office.

The international organisations that once provided legal support across the region have been gone for years. In 2025, three more local offices closed, including the local UNHCR office. Asylum seekers in the region have nowhere to turn and the remaining organisations providing legal support are incapable of covering the growing needs.

Despite these constraints, Equal Legal Aid and other organisations continue to file well-documented applications, fulfilling both a professional duty to applicants and a broader advocacy role in exposing systemic flaws within an already fragile judicial process. However, the cost of judicial proceedings is prohibitive for most. With NGO-based legal services collapsing, access to justice in Greece is largely theoretical, leaving vulnerable people exposed to systematic rights violations.

## INDICATIVE COST OF A SINGLE APPEAL IN COURT - COVERED BY ELA

Interim measures

**135€**

Annulment request

**267€**

Hearing and memo (opt.)

**287€**

Bailiff

**43€**

Average full appeal

**445-733€**

Indicative rates excl. VAT · Greek Administrative Court of Appeal

## What does a year of legal assistance actually look like?

Legal assistance covers a wide range of services, including an initial consultation to assess a person's situation and explain their options, preparation for and accompaniment to asylum interviews, and representation before appeals committees and administrative courts. Adopting a person-centred approach, it is tailored to each applicant's specific circumstances, vulnerabilities and needs, providing support from the initial stages of the procedure until a final decision is reached.

### OUR IMPACT IN 2025

*In 2025, of all asylum seekers represented by ELA who received a decision:*

**76%**

were granted protection  
at first instance

vs. 64% national avg.

**21%**

were granted protection,  
on appeal

vs. 4% national avg.

**67%**

had their court  
procedure granted

vs. 17% national avg.

Source: For national averages, 2025 annual data and statistics of the Greek Ministry of Asylum and Migration and data from the General Committee of the Greek Administrative Courts as of 3 September 2025. ELA rates apply to cases where a decision was issued in 2025 and representation was provided. At the national level, appeals require mandatory legal representation, while representation at first instance cases is optional.

#### PEOPLE SUPPORTED

**671**

Asylum seekers

#### HOURS RECORDED

**2,292h**

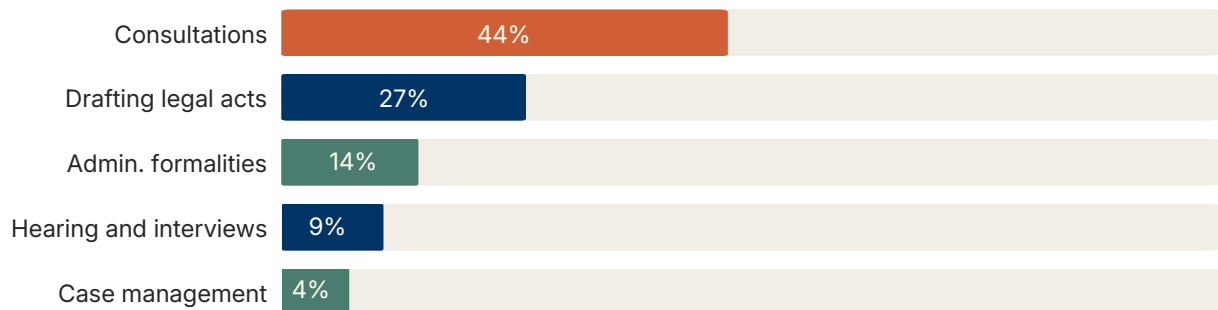
excl. hotline and legal clinics.

#### CONSULTATIONS

**1003** consultations

incl. 235 during legal clinics.

### HOW 2,292 RECORDED HOURS WERE SPENT



These figures cover only the legal work involved in ELA's cases. They do not account for time dedicated to managing our hotline, facilitating legal clinics throughout the year, or advocacy.

At this critical moment, ethical, practical and financial support is urgently needed to sustain these life-changing services, uphold a rights-based framework, and ensure that governments remain accountable to those seeking safety and justice.

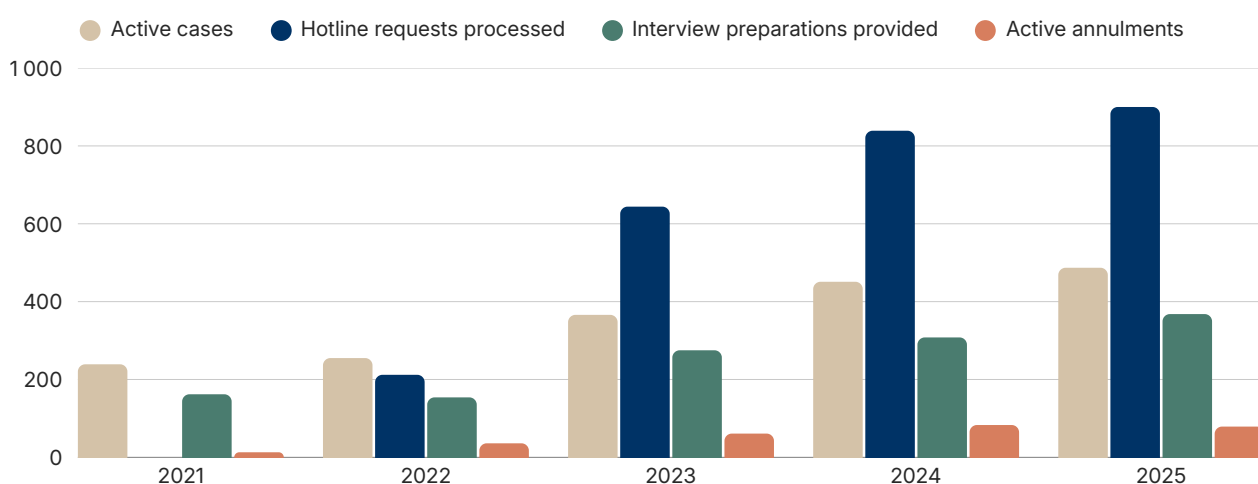
## Our commitment spans years.

The figures below capture the full scope of ELA's programme since 2021. They show not only growth in volume, but a deepening in the complexity and ambition of the legal work: more court filings, more interview preparations, more cases requiring sustained representation over multiple years. This growth has taken place against a backdrop of shrinking civil society capacity in the region: as other organisations withdrew, ELA's caseload and asylum seekers' needs have only grown.

### PROGRAMME INDICATORS 2021-2025

INDICATOR	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Trend
<b>REACH AND DEMAND</b>						
Hotline requests	n/a	212	644	839	900	↑
Legal clinics	33	32	78	78	44	↓
<b>LEGAL DEPTH</b>						
People assisted	513	503	543	723	671	→
Cases active during the year	239	255	366	451	487	↑
Lawyers deployed	7	10	13	14	11	↓
Consultations	437	738	706	904	1003	↑
Interview preparations	162	154	275	308	368	↑
<b>COURT COMMITMENT</b>						
Appeals active	11	46	50	49	42	→
Annulment requests active	13	36	61	83	79	→
Interim measures active	13	25	30	31	15	↓

The hotline growth rate is particularly significant as an independent indicator: people find ELA through partners, community networks, word of mouth in the camps. The volume of those requests has grown fourfold in three years. This demonstrates clearly how persistent and structural the need for legal assistance is in northern Greece.



The figures in this report reflect ELA's total active caseload each year: cases opened in the current year alongside cases carried over from previous years that remained open or were resolved during the year. One person may have more than one active procedure at the same time. This distinction is best exemplified by annulment requests: Of the 129 annulment requests ELA has filed with the Greek Administrative Courts since 2021, 61 were still pending in January 2026, the oldest dating back five years. Court proceedings can take years to reach a decision. ELA carries these cases forward year after year, ensuring all formalities are met in due course, until a final decision is taken.

# Immersion in our work

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION · DUBLIN REGULATION

### Zahra and Maryam\*

Zahra, 19, and her sister Maryam, 22, fled Afghanistan with their parents and three siblings in 2022. As members of the Hazara ethnic group, they faced severe persecution and imminent danger following the Taliban's return to power.

Their search for safety took them through Iran and into Türkiye, where the family was separated. While their father eventually reached France and was granted refugee status, the two sisters found themselves alone in Greece, where they applied for international protection in February 2025. Shortly after, the two sisters contacted ELA for legal assistance, in order to be reunited with their father in France.

The case presented significant legal challenges. Because Zahra and Maryam were adults, they did not qualify for standard family reunification under the Dublin Regulation. Instead, ELA's legal team had to argue for their reunification with their father, based on humanitarian grounds; specifically, on the basis of family and cultural considerations, under the discretionary clause. This means that the chances of getting the family reunited were very low: EU member states rarely accept requests for reunification from adult children and France was under no legal obligation to approve the application. A rejection would have left the sisters permanently separated from their father.

Through meticulous case preparation, ELA's lawyers successfully demonstrated the compelling humanitarian needs of the sisters.

In November 2025, the two sisters boarded a flight to France, finally reuniting with their father.

## LGBTQIA+ ASYLUM CLAIM · CREDIBILITY

### Paul\*

Paul, a Congolese human rights activist, had been persecuted in his country. His first asylum application was rejected despite evidence of torture and having been recognised as vulnerable. Through therapy, Paul was able to disclose the additional torture he had suffered due to his sexual orientation, as Paul is bisexual. He applied for asylum again, supported by medical reports. His application was rejected a second time.

As with many LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers in Europe, the authorities refused to recognise Paul's sexual orientation on the grounds that he is married with children. With his lawyer, Paul has filed a second appeal, arguing that his sexual orientation and its consequences had not been taken seriously.

Trans, queer, bisexual, gay and lesbian asylum seekers face the same difficulties as heterosexual refugees, but carry a double burden: homo- and transphobia, including from protection officers. It is not uncommon for protection officers to ask very intimate questions about the applicant's sexuality and sexual practices to "verify" their sexual orientation. If the applicant does not conform to the stereotype an officer expects, their claim is instantly questioned and often rejected.

Two years after lodging his second appeal, the Administrative Court of Thessaloniki found that the credibility assessment in Paul's case had been improperly conducted. The Court ruled that his rejection was based on flawed reasoning and ordered his case to be re-examined.

This ruling is one of the rare instances in which a domestic court has explicitly recognised the improper handling of an LGBTQIA+ asylum claim and the problematic use of stereotypes in credibility assessments. The procedure is still ongoing.

\*Names have been changed.

In 2025, 61,629 asylum applications were lodged in Greece - 13,629 from women and girls. Many are fleeing life-threatening conditions rooted in systemic gender inequality and discrimination. For most, displacement marks the beginning of a new cycle as the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) is frequently higher during exile than before it. But stories of violence experienced in countries of origin, during travel, or upon arrival remain hidden within the intimate realm: in most cases, the Greek asylum system provides no safe or appropriate space in which to disclose them.

Structurally, the Greek asylum system ignores their specific needs: overcrowded camps, absent medical and psychological support, degrading living conditions, and inadequate recovery services leave survivors without safety nor dignity. ELA's experience shows that systemic flaws lead to the unjust rejection of GBV-related claims: through flawed interviews, superficial credibility assessments, and a near-total absence of trauma-informed legal support.

## THE SPECIFIC LEGAL BARRIERS GBV SURVIVORS FACE

- **Flawed credibility assessments:** Interviewers apply standards of consistency and detail that are incompatible with trauma disclosure. Non-disclosure of violence is routinely treated as evidence of fabrication rather than as a recognised trauma response, contrary to official guidance.
- **Gender-insensitive interview conditions:** Mixed-gender interpreters, absence of female interviewers on request, lack of private space; conditions that make disclosure of sexual violence effectively impossible, regardless of a person's willingness to speak.
- **Non-application of the Istanbul Protocol:** International standards on documentation of torture and ill-treatment are rarely applied in GBV asylum cases in Greece. Medical and psychological evidence that could substantiate a claim is not accessible, and its absence is then used to question credibility.

747

women and girls assisted by ELA since 2020

328

single women or mothers, main applicants of the case

140

self-declared GBV survivors assisted since 2020 - 27 new in 2025

56

legal proceedings in support of GBV survivors in 2025

## Rosy's case

Rosy\* is a 32-year-old single woman from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She arrived in Greece in 2023, having fled her home country due to gender-based violence and human trafficking. She has been the victim of repeated rape since the age of 15, as well as systematic sexual abuse by a family member. She was also sexually abused several times during her exile. She suffers from serious medical and mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

The accounts she provided to the authorities during her asylum procedure were found to be credible. Yet, her application was rejected at both first and second instance on the grounds that "a well-founded fear of persecution" had not been established, despite the credibility finding.

With the support of ELA, she submitted an application for annulment. The Court ruled that the previous decision lacked proper legal reasoning and that the Appeal Authorities should have taken into account the fact that "a large number of cases of domestic and sexual violence are never reported to the authorities due to prevailing social attitudes, as well as the authorities' lack of effectiveness." Rosy's case was sent back to the appeals authority to be re-examined a second time and is still pending.

## FURTHER READING

"Greece's asylum system fails survivors of gender-based violence: How to break the continuum of violence" article from ELA, published on December 11, 2025 in Alliance Magazine.

# Advocacy and communication

In an increasingly hostile political environment, where misinformation about asylum is weaponised and xenophobic rhetoric mainstreamed, ELA's advocacy work is both a responsibility and a necessity. As an organisation with direct, daily experience of the Greek asylum system, we hold a privileged position: we witness the violations that go undocumented, and the human consequences of policies debated in abstract in European institutions.

ELA's advocacy operates across three strands: strategic litigation and sharing legal expertise with our peers; documenting violations and submitting evidence to monitoring bodies; and raising public awareness of the right to asylum. Strategic litigation is covered in the Focus section of this report.

## OUR IMPACT IN 2025

7

Publications and expert reports

6

Newsletters sent to subscribers

~83k

Views and impressions across all platforms

3,780

Followers on social media

## DOCUMENTING VIOLATIONS: SUBMISSIONS AND REPORTS

JAN  
2025

**14 years after M.S.S. - Joint submission to the Committee of Ministers in the M.S.S. case**  
I Have Rights, ELA and Mobile Info Team submitted joint evidence on ongoing deficiencies in reception conditions, de facto detention, lack of protection of vulnerable groups, and barriers to fair asylum procedures and legal aid as part of the assessment of implementation of the M.S.S. ruling from the ECtHR. 14 years on, Greece has still not fully implemented the Court's decision.

With I Have Rights · Mobile Info Team

MAY  
2025

### Joint statement on camp evictions

Following the Ministry of Migration's order to evict both recognised refugees and rejected asylum seekers from camps without alternative housing, ELA and 30 other organisations called on authorities to halt evictions until safe, sustainable housing solutions are in place, with particular concern for children, pregnant women, and people with medical needs.

With 30 civil society organisations

JUL  
2025

### Joint statement on the Committee of Ministers' examination of the M.S.S. case

ELA and partners welcomed the Committee's decision to continue monitoring detention and living conditions, while strongly contesting the decision to close the supervision of asylum procedures under the M.S.S. ruling, despite most issues from 2023 remaining unresolved or worsening.

With Border Violence Monitoring Network · Border Criminologies · I Have Rights · Mobile Info Team

JUL  
2025

### Contribution to the Greek Asylum Case Law Report, issue 1/2025

ELA contributed 11 decisions (3 annulment decisions, 6 provisional measures, 2 Appeals Committee decisions) to this collective resource covering Safe Third Country interpretation, evidence assessment, procedural safeguards, and immigration detention in Greece.

With GCR · HIAS Greece · RSA · METAdrasi · Equal Rights Beyond Borders · ELIL · Refugee Legal Support · Human Rights Legal Project · Legal Centre Lesbos · SolidarityNow · The HOME Project

2026  
EUAA

### Contribution to the EUAA Annual Report 2026

ELA contributed to the EU Agency for Asylum's annual report, which includes civil society perspectives from EU+ countries on developments in asylum at regional and national levels.

## Raising public awareness of the right to asylum

### PUBLICATIONS AND STATEMENTS

In a public debate dominated by political instrumentalisation, ELA seeks to publish verified field-level information that shed light on the lived reality of displacement.

Alliance Magazine · Dec 2025

Article

"Greece's asylum system fails survivors of GBV: How to break the continuum of violence": drawing on ELA's experience with 82 survivors since 2020, the article calls for survivor-centred legal assistance and dedicated philanthropy to ensure protection and dignity.

See also: [Focus on GBV survivors](#).

ELA website · May 2025

Legal analysis

"In refugee camps, notifications must be made in person, Greek court rules": analysing three rulings on in-person notification requirements and the consequences of digitalisation without adequate legal safeguards for access to appeal rights.

See also: [Focus on strategic litigation](#).

Statement · Jan 2025

Statement

A survivor of FGM, forced marriage, and domestic violence is reunified with her son in France after six years in Greece and five negative asylum decisions - published as direct evidence of Greece's systematic failure to apply international GBV protection standards.

Joint statement · March 2025

Statement

ELA and four partner organisations called on Greece to resume cash assistance immediately, after nine months without payments, leaving asylum seekers in isolated camps without income to cover transport, food, or healthcare.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

ELA's social media presence is an extension of its advocacy voice, used to document violations in real time, amplify field testimony, and contest the narratives that make those violations possible. In 2025, ELA published 182 posts and 453 stories across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, reaching a combined audience of 3,780 followers and generating approximately 83,000 views and impressions across platforms. Engagement grew significantly year on year: content interactions on Instagram doubled (+100%), and new followers on Facebook grew by 73%.

On LinkedIn – where ELA has its largest following at 1,306 – the dominant professional categories are non-profit organisations, government administrations, and law and legal practice, with readers primarily based in Greece (26%), France (15%), Germany (13%) and the UK (9%).

#### FACEBOOK

37k views

1,098 followers

+73% new followers

#### INSTAGRAM

12,4k views

1,400 followers

+48% views

#### LINKEDIN

33,4k impressions

1,306 followers

+323% new followers

### 2025 NEWSLETTERS

Feb The grinding machine and the invisible army

Apr Introducing our 2024 activity report

Jun Gaza's children cannot eat official statements

Jul No rest for justice

Oct Some difficult news from northern Greece

Dec Legal aid is solidarity in action

Strategic or impact litigation involves the careful selection of a case and the development of a legal strategy to challenge recurring systemic violations of rights. It is distinct from individual representation: it advances not just the rights of the person in the case, but the rights of many, seeking precedents with broader legal and social consequences. When ELA identifies a pattern of illegal practice across multiple cases, it selects cases that can challenge that pattern before the courts.

In 2025, ELA invested more than ever in strategic litigation, simultaneously pursuing numerous proceedings before Greek courts in cases involving particularly flagrant rights violations. Two legal grounds have structured this work.

## ACCESS TO ASYLUM - REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATION

One of the main violations ELA identifies is the absence of sufficient and lawful reasoning in decisions rejecting applications for international protection. This takes two recurring forms: vague references to alleged inconsistencies that undermine the applicant's credibility without specifying them; and rejection on the grounds that a well-founded fear of persecution has not been established, even where the applicant's account is found credible - a logical contradiction. Conclusions often rely on inadequate or selective references to country of origin information, sometimes even contradicting the international sources cited in the same rejection decision.

- **Use of reliable international resources in asylum proceedings** Decision AΔ370/2025

In the case of a woman seeking international protection from religious persecution, the Administrative Court of Thessaloniki ruled that the decision to reject her application was arbitrary. The asylum application had initially been rejected on the grounds that the fear of persecution was "based on personal perceptions and not factual evidence." The Court annulled this reasoning for failing to use information from reliable international sources regarding the country of origin and the specific claims.

- **Contradictory reference to international sources** Decision AΔ677/2025

In the case of a young man from Mali with a serious medical condition, the Court found that the asylum authorities were not making proper use of international sources. The authorities had rejected the applicant despite recognising that the healthcare system in Mali was dysfunctional, claiming that his medical needs would be met upon return, while his life would have been endangered. The Court sanctioned this inconsistent reasoning and the case was re-examined. In 2026, he was granted subsidiary protection.

## RIGHT TO AN EFFECTIVE REMEDY

- **Unlawful notification by email** Decision AΔ 6/2025

Greece, like other EU countries, has expanded the digitalisation of asylum procedures, a trend accelerated during COVID-19 amid gaps in interpretation and legal services. However, practices such as unlawful email notifications have directly undermined access to legal remedies: if a person is not properly notified of a rejection decision, they cannot exercise their right to appeal. In January 2025, the Thessaloniki Administrative Court ruled that decisions on asylum applications for residents of reception facilities must be delivered in person, not by email. Camp settings require in-person delivery to ensure applicants are properly informed.

### FURTHER READING

ELA, 2025, *In refugee camps, notifications must be made in person, Greek court rules*, published on May 22, 2025 on our website.

ELA, *Jurisprudence collections* vol. I (2021/2023) et vol. II (2023/2025) available in Greek and English online.

# Immersion in our work

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## LGBTQIA+ · SAFE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN Pape\*

Pape\* is from Senegal. He was forced to leave his country due to persecution linked to his sexual orientation - facing threats and severe assault in a country that criminalises homosexuality. One year after he applied for asylum in Greece, Senegal incidentally passed a law doubling prison sentences for homosexuality.

Pape's case carried two compounding legal obstacles. Firstly, he is from a country Greek asylum authorities designate as "safe". This means applicants face a heightened burden of proof and must clearly demonstrate that the country is not safe for them, specifically. Second, his asylum claim was based on his sexual orientation, a ground that carries high rejection rates: Authorities are prejudiced and frequently assume that LGBTQIA+ applicants can simply conceal who they are to survive in hostile environments.

ELA supported Pape through the entire asylum procedure, with multiple in-depth consultations, evidence collection, and attendance at every interview. Throughout this demanding process, Pape remained composed and determined.

Against all odds, Pape was granted refugee status, a decision that sets an important precedent for asylum seekers from nominally "safe" countries facing persecution on grounds of sexual orientation.

Pape will be able to start rebuilding his life in a safer environment where his life and freedom are not at risk.

## ASYLUM INTERVIEW PREPARATION · ONGOING James\*

James is 19 years old man from Sierra Leone. Fearing death threats and imprisonment, James applied for asylum in Greece in 2024. He is currently staying in a camp in northern Greece. He contacted ELA's team for support in understanding the asylum procedure and to help him prepare for his interview.

James has been an orphan since the age of two. At 15, he fled Sierra Leone to escape death threats from his uncle, a powerful politician who had used James to deliver messages to armed groups and political opponents. After James was forced to participate in a protest and recognised by the authorities, both the government and his uncle saw him as a threat to be silenced. The corrupt authorities in Sierra Leone were unable to offer him any protection.

James is also part of the LGBT+ community. In Sierra Leone, it is illegal for two men to have sexual relations. Anyone found guilty of this offense faces a prison sentence of between 10 years and life.

James' asylum interview has not taken place yet. ELA is accompanying him through the preparation process, ensuring he understands what to expect, can present his account clearly and is not alone when facing this harrowing procedure.

In 2024, 75.5% of people from Sierra Leone had their initial asylum application rejected in Greece. His case is one of hundreds in which ELA's role is not yet to contest a decision, but to ensure the first steps are taken well.

*\*Names have been changed.*

# Development and finances

## 2025 KEY FIGURES

16

foundations and funds supporting ELA

7

capacity-building trainings attended by the team

6

networks for cooperation and advocacy to which ELA participates

In 2025, ELA invested in the knowledge, skills and partnerships that make sustained legal action possible. Alongside its core legal programme, the team participated in training across legal, psychological, and operational domains, and maintained the collaborative networks on which its outreach and advocacy depend.

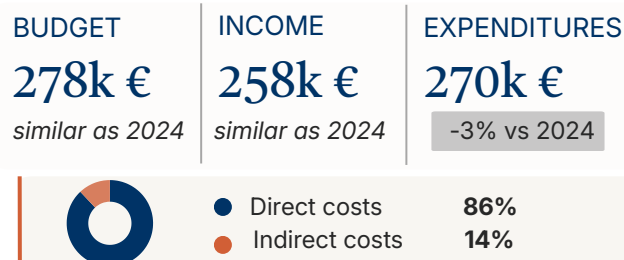
## CAPACITY- BUILDING

- The Charter of Fundamental Rights: Implementation in legal proceedings**  
*Training provided by ARSIS on applying the EU Charter in national asylum and migration cases.*
- ECRE Seminar on the Pact on Migration and Asylum**  
*In-depth analysis of the Pact's five legislative instruments, organised by ECRE in Brussels.*
- First-aid - three sessions**  
*Practical trainings provided to our team by our partners from Mediqualeam.*
- De-escalation in community settings**  
*A training provided to our team by our partners from Wave.*
- Building equal relationships with communities**  
*A workshop on participatory approaches, provided by Second Tree.*
- Lived-experiences as expertise - inclusion in research on movement and exploitation**  
*A workshop by Asylas and Human Trafficking Research Network (HRTN).*
- Narrative in the migration and asylum context - a six-session workshop**  
*Extended workshop series on narrative frameworks and communication in asylum work.*

## OPERATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

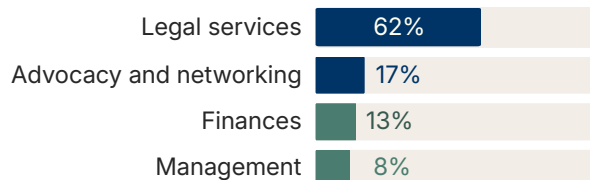
We extend our heartfelt thanks to our partners, who provided communities across northern Greece with access to essential services and support throughout the year.

## FINANCIAL SITUATION IN 2025



In 2025, ELA recorded a funding gap of €12,000 against budget, reflecting the increasingly competitive grants environment. This gap has been managed through reserve drawdown.

## EXPENSES BY CATEGORY



## OUR SUPPORTERS IN 2025

The funding landscape in 2025 was demanding. Increased competition for a reduced pool of grants and the broader contraction of humanitarian funding made new fundraising difficult. ELA is grateful that the core of its donor base has remained stable over several years.

Humanity Now · Fund for Global Human Rights · Inkermann Fund · Marseille Bar Association · Foundation UMPT · Choose Love · CCFD-Terre Solidaire · Haella Foundation · Secours Catholique · Foundation PAM · Solidaritee · UNIFOR Social Justice Fund · Project Elpida · Britford Bridge Foundation (new funder).

# In their own words



I want to add something more personal because words are not enough to describe how I feel. Before I met Ms. Livia\* and your organization, I felt lost and alone after everything I went through. Your support gave me more than just legal help; it gave me hope and a feeling that I finally have a family here who cares about my safety and my future. You didn't just handle a case, you saved a person. I will never forget your kindness and the humanity you showed me. Thank you for being the light in my darkest days.

A participant supported by ELA in 2025

*"I am writing to express my deepest gratitude for all the support you have provided me. I especially want to thank you for assigning Ms. Maria\* to my case. She is an amazing lawyer and a wonderful person; she has worked tirelessly for me, stood by my side during the most difficult times, and showed true dedication to my case. I feel safe and supported because of her efforts and your organization's help."*

A participant supported by ELA in 2025

*"Having my lawyer's support over all these years means a lot to me. With her, I feel guided and confident. She always knows what to do and how to help me. When I can't attend my administrative appointments, she goes on my behalf. She and her team always take the time to listen, reassure me, and explain things as clearly as possible. The whole team always welcomes us with respect and kindness."*

A participant supported by ELA in 2025



I have decided to volunteer as an interpreter for Equal Legal Aid because I know from personal experience how difficult it can be for refugees to navigate the system when they are limited by language barriers. I saw this as an opportunity to help others who feel lost in legal limbo. I also want to give back to my community. Life here is not easy. Limited resources and uncertainty can weigh heavily. However, I have learnt that we are all stronger than we realise. My message to the world is simple: see refugees as people with dreams, passions, and stories, not just as numbers. Open your hearts, listen to us and help us to build a future in which everyone, whether a refugee or not, can thrive.

Nathan\*, volunteer interpreter at ELA

*"The open door policy of ELA leads to the major part of our work as volunteer lawyers : being contacted or going to meet people from all over Northern Greece who have undefined legal needs because of the total lack of legal information people on the move face. By providing this, ELA helps them to understand, adapt and take informed decisions on their procedure and their life. "*

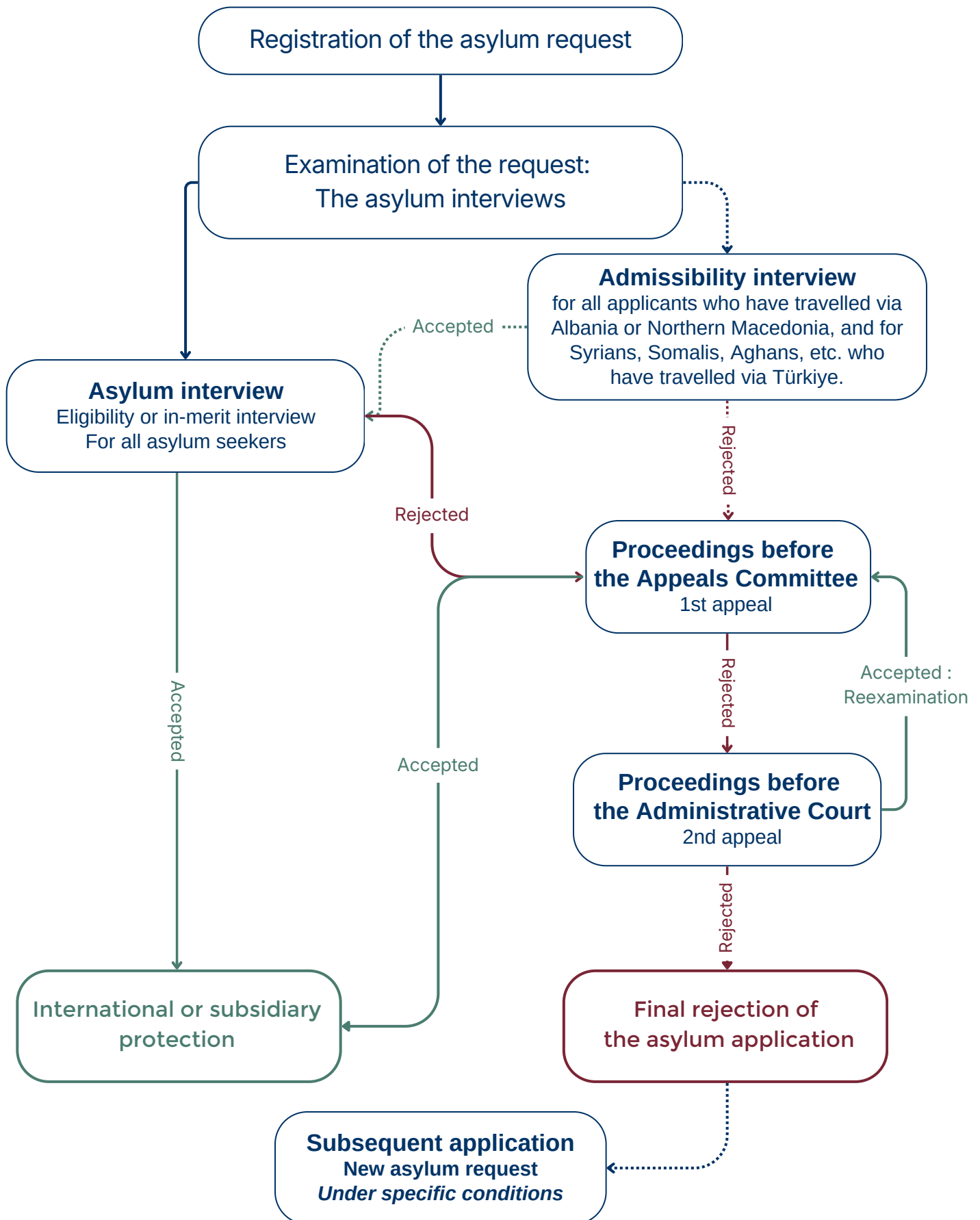
Marie\*, volunteer lawyer at ELA

\*Names have been changed.

*"The asylum procedure is incredibly chaotic, and applicants face a critical lack of information. Interview preparations are vital, as this is the most decisive stage of the procedure and frequently the applicant's sole opportunity to present their claim. Expecting traumatized individuals to navigate this bureaucracy alone is deeply inhuman. Legal support is an absolute necessity."*

Efthemia\*, volunteer lawyer at ELA

# The asylum procedure in Greece





**Equal Legal Aid**

Non-profit organisation

N°RNA : W595035578

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