



Legal Centre Lesvos Actions report for 2019

In 2019 Legal Centre Lesvos has successfully assisted in many cases in the family reunification of asylum seekers in Greece with family members in other European Union countries. It has helped lifting geographical restrictions for vulnerable people, in finding safe housing and health care, defending criminal proceedings and obtaining international protection (refugee status or subsidiary protection) in Greece. Legal Centre Lesvos also has monitored and documented human rights violations and has dealt with local, national and international defense (European Court of Human Rights).

In particular, at the close of 2019 our office was managing 421 open case files including both individuals and families. Of these 421 cases, 275 were new beneficiaries between October - December 2019, of which 41% were women and 16% were minor children (alone or with their families). In terms of nationality, 72% of our cases involved individuals or families from Afghanistan. Within this period, the rest of our beneficiaries originated from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Haiti, Ghana, Kuwait, Sudan, Palestine, and Zimbabwe. 94% of our beneficiaries in this period were living in Moria camp. The management of these cases involved volunteer caseworkers, interpreters and Greek attorneys and included following up with clients, providing information about the asylum procedure, and informing individuals of their rights and obligations, preparing clients for their asylum interviews, referring them to protection services, supporting family reunification applications, preparation of legal memos and appeals procedure.

Further, between October-December 2019 25 families were represented in their Dublin III procedure, which involved significant research, drafting memos and liaising with numerous parties including beneficiaries, Dublin unit, social workers, guardians in other member states, forensic offices, asylum offices, interpreters, prosecutors, and other authorities. In the same period four families we represented had their applications for family reunification through Dublin III Regulations approved, enabling our clients to reunite with family members in France, Germany, and Sweden.

Summarizing throughout 2019:

1. Case Management/legal support:

- We provided individualized legal information and legal aid to 790 individuals and families.
- We represented at least 46 families or individuals with their family reunification application and have followed up on approx 100 family reunification cases. We counted 10 successful Dublin III requests with applicants having been accepted to travel to the respective European country to be reunified with their family member (s) and to complete their asylum process there. We are expecting more positive replies, since many family reunification requests we supported are still pending in regards to their outcome.

- We also successfully represented 7 individuals who were detained facing deportation, but who had important new elements to present new asylum claims that were taken into consideration and ultimately they were released from detention as asylum seekers.
- We referred hundreds of beneficiaries to alternative accommodation both in Mytilene and the mainland following the respective procedure each month. The number of beneficiaries we are able to refer to accommodation services is dependent on the availability of alternative accommodation and the capacity of the organizations facilitating housing. Therefore, we prioritized the most vulnerable cases in this procedure. In the last month of 2019, we successfully referred 44 individuals and families to alternative accommodation.
- On average our two Greek attorneys based in Lesbos represent 3 beneficiaries per month in their interviews. In order to have the greatest impact, given our limited capacity, we prioritized cases for representation at the interview stage and on appeal to cases in which we could argue for the expansion of the grounds of international protection granted under Greek law. For example, we represented individuals who risk serious harm in their home country as a result of climate change and individuals who have no connection to their country of origin, such as Afghan nationals who were born in and have lived all their lives in Iran, but face being deported to Afghanistan, a country they have never even visited. We also prioritized for representation particularly vulnerable individuals who would more likely benefit through representation of an attorney. For example, applicants who had experienced memory loss as a result of PTSD or clients who were less willing to discuss important details of their claim because of stigma benefited through the presence of a lawyer who could pose questions in order to address areas that may have been missed by the EASO caseworker, and submit a legal memorandum in support of the case to argue for eligibility for asylum.
- Our attorneys also represented individuals/families in procedural matters with the Asylum office, EASO, and the police, following up on dozens of cases each month.
- We also represented 19 individuals on appeal in 2019. Of these cases, three were approved, three were rejected, and the rest are still pending.
- We successfully co-represented several families and individuals in the “Saphoo122” trial pleading for their right of peaceful gathering.

2. Advocacy/Strategic litigation

- We took part in joint advocacy actions initiated by the weekly Advocacy Group meetings bringing to the attention of the authorities several problematic issues and suggested and asked for respective sustainable solutions.
- Inter alia, we co-organized with Oxfam and hosted in Legal Centre offices a meeting including other actors in Lesbos and members of the migrant community a meeting with the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner. Following her visit, a respective press released was published, leading to the immediate transfer from Lesbos to the mainland of approximately 800 asylum seekers:
- Legal Centre Lesbos attorney attended a meeting with Miguel Urbán from Podemos party, European member of parliament, attended by Legal Centre, together with other legal aid actors
- Legal Centre Lesbos team attended the Izmir Human Rights Academy: Human Rights under Oppressive Regimes in October 2019. Our presence as foreign delegates was important given the especially sensitive time in Turkey. In addition, the conference was an opportunity for developing a closer relationship with Turkish lawyers which will be essential as the new Greek legislation will lead to an increase in the deportation of asylum seekers to Turkey and the need for increased cooperation.
- We coordinated with Oxfam a meeting and advocacy with FRONTEX' Fundamental Rights Office, regarding systematic violations by Frontex in registration procedure – in which

- minors are registered as adults without original documentation,
- As our main strategic litigation action, we proceeded to the submission of a Rule 39 Petition for interim measures to the European Court of Human Rights and succeeded in obtaining interim measures to halt the scheduled deportation of an asylum seeker Afghan man.
 - We also continuously aimed to raise awareness of human rights violations by conducting periodically respective reports.

3. Other activities:

- **Women's Storytelling workshops:** Legal Centre Lesvos started in 2019 hosting a weekly storytelling workshop supported by 'Ponts per la pau'. The workshop is led by women from the Afghan community and brings them together to recall their life stories and write about their live situation on Lesvos. The project has amplified the voices of women living in Moria Camp and provides them a platform to publish their writings. On a roughly bi-monthly basis, participants in the workshop publish on the Legal Centre Lesvos' guest volunteer blog. We will continue to support this project throughout 2020.

Conclusion: Counting our actions in this short operational period Legal Cente Lesvos AMKE has managed to be true to its statutory purposes with limited sources. Given the challenging period we are facing in Greece and worldwide Legal Centre Lesvos will aim to continue its work and to maintain a legitimate and independent voice in order to be able to serve its statutory purposes in defense of human rights.

Mytilene, 16th of March 2020

On behalf of Legal Centre Lesvos AMKE



LEGAL CENTRE LESVOS AMKE

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