

Support Refugees' Rights



**HELLENIC LEAGUE
for HUMAN RIGHTS**

Athens, July 2019

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Identity of the League

The Hellenic League for Human Rights (HLHR) is a Civil Society Organization that defends and intervenes decisively for human rights in Greece. The League undertakes activities in the domain of dissemination, advocacy and development of principles that reckon to men rights and freedoms, integrated to social structures.

The issues that the League attributes special attention are:

- Racist violence and the rise of far-right extremism
- Refugees and migrants' rights
- Censorship and protection of freedom of speech
- The perpetual issue of State-Church relations, the consistent problems faced in the field of religious freedom in Greece, and in general prejudice against difference.
- Police arbitrariness
- Citizenship

The League undertakes actions, at individual and collective level, in relation to human rights monitoring and protection, by providing legal assistance and legal aid, strategic litigation, raising public awareness, conduct trainings, issuing reports, as well as deepening the public dialogue on human rights.

Introduction

The HLHR responded at the recent massive influx of refugee flows in Greece in multiple ways over the last years, by raising awareness and deepen the public dialogue with regards to refugee protection, through regular public interventions with press releases, press conferences, documentation texts, memos legislative proposals and reports. In this context, since August 2016, HLHR has developed a number of services to address refugees' rights protection. Hellenic League for Human Rights implemented the project "*Provision of legal and other essential information to refugees*", which started in August 2016 and lasted, after an extension period, until December 2017. Since August 2016 three (3) field teams consisted by legal experts and interpreters provided legal counseling at the accommodation centers of

Softex – Diavata and Dion – Elpida in Thessaloniki as well as at Skaramagkas accommodation center in Attica region.

After evaluating the experience gained over the one and a half (½) year in the field of asylum, HLHR continued in this direction in order to assist in the protection of refugees and asylum seekers by providing legal aid.

The implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement produced substantial asylum reforms and policy changes. The Hellenic League for Human Rights had stressed the danger that the implementation of the so called agreement would entail not only the fragmentation of the right to asylum but also the undermining of the basic principles of the rule of law. Over the past three years, continuous changes in asylum policy and in practices have called into question the extent to which the right to asylum is respected. The asylum framework has undergone significant reforms, namely with regards to the examination of asylum applications on the Eastern Aegean islands. The highly problematic fast-track border asylum procedure with the use of the “safe third country”, the concentration of thousands of people on the Greek islands, especially on Lesbos with the imposition of geographical restrictions, staying under appalling conditions, have made the need for effective legal aid indispensable.

The project “*Support Refugees’ Rights*” provided legal support to asylum seekers belonging to vulnerable groups, while monitored and advocated for refugees’ rights.

By the time the project started its implementation, the EU Turkey Statement had been into force for two (2) years.

Description of the field of intervention

In Lesbos, the Regional Asylum Office formally registers all applications for international protection while people stay in the hotspot. Their freedom of movement is limited and a geographical is imposed to all newcomers. All applicants, except for vulnerable persons and family reunification cases under the Dublin Regulation (EU) No. 604/2013, are obliged to stay in the Reception and Identification Centre, until the end of the asylum procedure, including during the review by the appeal committee. For vulnerable cases, the practice has not always been the same. Since late 2018, the Greek Asylum Service has been lifting

geographical restriction when asylum applicants are found to be vulnerable. Prior to that, however, many vulnerable applicants had to stay in the hotspots not just until they were found vulnerable but until their first asylum interview.

As procedures take time to complete and people continue to arrive, accommodation capacity is quickly overstretched. The length of the asylum procedure depends not only on the number of arrivals and the circumstances of each case but also on the capacity of the caseworkers and interpreters, as well as on the availability of space to conduct interviews on the island.¹

In the Reception and Identification Centre, shortages of personnel (doctors, psychologists, social workers and interpreters) created constant delays in identification leading to prolonged stay of vulnerable people in inadequate conditions. In addition, the substandard reception conditions contributed to the increasing vulnerabilities. Vulnerable people were allowed to leave the island, however, the accommodation for people seeking asylum on the mainland is also insufficient, and vulnerable people had to wait for long periods of time before they could finally be transferred to accommodation facilities on the mainland.

The imposition of geographical restrictions on Lesbos

The imposition of the geographical restrictions on the islands in the context of the asylum procedure was initially based on a June 2017 Decision of the Director of the Asylum Service.² This decision was annulled by the Council of State on 17 April 2018, following an action brought by Greek Council for Refugees and the Bar Associations of Lesbos, Rhodes, Chios, Leros, Kos and Samos.³ The Court said that the Decision of the Asylum Service Director does not set out legal grounds for the imposition of restrictions on asylum seekers' freedom of movement, and deduced no serious reasons of public interest to justify the necessity of the restriction in accordance with Article 31(2) of the Geneva Convention. Moreover, the Council of State held that the regime of geographical restriction within the Greek islands has

¹ FRA, Opinion of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights on fundamental rights in the 'hotspots' set up in Greece and Italy: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-opinion-5-2016-hotspots_en.pdf

² Asylum Service Director Decision 10464, Gov. Gazette B 1977/7.06.2017

³ Greece, Council of State Decision 805/2018, 18 April 2018

resulted in unequal distribution of asylum seekers across the national territory and significant pressure on the affected islands compared to other regions. However, the ruling was issued without retroactive effect and does not apply to people who arrived on the islands prior to the decision. A new regulatory Decision of the Director of the Asylum Service was issued three days after the judgment and restored the geographical restriction on the Eastern Aegean islands.⁴ This Decision was replaced in October 2018.⁵ According to the Decision currently in force: *“1. A restriction on movement within the island from which they entered the Greek territory is imposed on applicants of international protection who enter the Greek territory through the islands of Lesbos, Rhodes, Samos, Kos, Leros and Chios. 2. The restriction on movement shall not be imposed or lifted for persons subject to the provisions of Articles 8 to 11 of Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 as well as persons belonging to vulnerable groups, according to paragraph 8 of article 14 of Law 4375/2016.”*

The geographical restriction was lifted in the following cases: 1. Persons granted international protection have their restriction lifted at the time they receive the positive decision; 2. Asylum seekers who fall under the Dublin Regulation’s family provisions; 3. Asylum seekers who have been identified as vulnerable.

The practice of this imposition of the geographical restriction since the launch of the EU-Turkey Statement led to a significant overcrowding in Lesbos, where the RIC was hosting at times three times its nominal capacity. The vast majority of asylum seekers could not leave the island until the asylum procedure was completed. In that respect, they remained for anything from several months up to more than a year in precarious conditions in poorly-equipped, overcrowded spaces, since for non-vulnerable persons, the length of stay on the island depended on the length of the asylum procedure. During HLHR’s intervention, the practice of imposing geographical restriction changed several times. This had a direct impact in the asylum procedure for vulnerable people leaving the island, since it created a dysfunctional framework with regards to the designated Regional Asylum Office. In November 2018, the Regional Asylum Office in Lesbos removed the geographical restriction of vulnerable people regardless of whether a first degree decision was issued or their

⁴ Decision ο.κ. 8269/2018 of the Director of the Asylum Service on restriction of movement of applicants for international protection Gazette B/1366/20.04.2018, available at: http://www.et.gr/idos-nph/pdfimageSummaryviewer.html?args=sppFfdN7IQP5_cc--m0e183Yj8syUyOHzioKt5-s0HW8rzSZFgk-aQ8stXR4YPpkAYi3ORfmarM6Ym_fEOTFj5-dYQCMjJv75h8iB-tM3_vKMSuwFT8g8jMbcMCubIFfxlNP8qam0a2Rw1H4nQiBgNAQ_djWvLI5w35AjY_fYV7qESEgxS4rg..

⁵ Asylum Service Director Decision 18984, Gov. Gazette B 4427/05.10.2018

interview was conducted. At that time, people were being informed that they must come back on the island for their interview; otherwise an order of interruption would be issued.

In October 2018, the National Commission for Human Rights, the independent advisory body to the Greek State on matters pertaining to human rights protection, reiterated *“its firm and consistently expressed position about the immediate termination of the entrapment of the applicants for international protection in the Eastern Aegean islands and the lifting of geographical limitations imposed on them”*.⁶ The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights has also urged to the Greek authorities to reconsider the geographical limitation practice.⁷

On April 2018, HLHR send a Memo to the Parliament’s Committee of Public Administration, Public Order and Justice on the draft law of the Ministry of Migration Policy that brought reforms to the asylum and first reception procedures. HLHR stressed that the rule of geographical restriction goes beyond the limits of the principle of proportionality, since imposing a geographical constraint, without providing a maximum time limit, and even in structures which are unsuitable for long-term residence and overpopulated, may lead to a violation of Articles 3 and 5 of the ECHR. For that, HLHR suggested the inclusion of a maximum time limit for imposing the restriction as well as the provision for a reasoned decision.

Living conditions at the Reception and accommodation centre of Moria

During the whole course of our intervention the situation in the RIC of Moria was highly critical. Overcrowding remained a serious problem, with new arrivals outstripping transfers to the mainland. Moria camp was at all times severely overcrowded at double its capacity, and has often been at more than three times its capacity in 2018 and 2019. According to figures of the Ministry of Migration policy, the nominal capacity of the RIC facility was 3100.⁸

⁶ National Commission for Human Rights, Statement- The GNCHR expresses its deep concerns about the situation in the Reception Centers of the Eastern Aegean islands and, especially, of Moria in Lesvos: http://www.nchr.gr/images/English_Site/PROSFYGES/GNCHR%20Statement_Moria_2018.pdf

⁷ Report of the Commissioner For Human Rights of the Council Of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, following her visit to Greece from 25 to 29 June 2018: <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-the-visit-to-greece-from-25-to-29-june-2018-by-dunja-mijatov/16808ea5bd>

⁸Ministry of Digital Policy, Telecommunication and Information, information on the situation on the five Aegean islands where hotspots operate:

The number of asylum seekers hosted in an overcrowded manner varied during the course of the year; however, it remained particularly high.

Living conditions in the RIC of Moria were very poor and extremely worrying. Protection failures and serious overcrowding had created an unsafe environment for everyone but mostly for women and children. Asylum seekers were hosted in containers, or large tents hosting people in amid conditions, with almost no privacy. Others slept in makeshift shelters, at the mercy of the weather. Asylum seekers living in Moria also had to queue in long waiting lines to collect food rations three times per day.

The RIC is divided into sections:

- a. The main section is the one where the majority of asylum seekers are accommodated, which contains containers as well as tents due to overpopulation.
- b. The RIC's closed section, which contains the area of registration where the personnel conducts the predicted procedures, an area for the initial detention of newcomers, and the sections for the accommodation of the most vulnerable (families, single women, UAM).

Over congestion has led to a vast number of people being accommodated outside the RIC's premises, in an adjoining makeshift camp called "olive grove". Accommodation there was offered only in tents and the area is largely left unsupervised.

The overall conditions of hygiene and sanitation to which asylum seekers accommodated at the RIC were exposed were to say the least insufficient and substandard. Medical organizations have reported recurrent cases of diarrhea and skin infections due to the unsanitary conditions in and around Moria. The combination of unhealthy and dangerous conditions and inadequate access to health services were detrimental.⁹ In September 2018, inspectors from the Lesvos public health directorate found that the Moria camp was unsuitable and dangerous for public health and the environment, including because toilet waste pipes were broken in a section of the camp, resulting in a strong stench and creating a danger to public health. The Prefect of Northern Aegean had given at the time 30 days to the Ministry of Migration Policy to clean up the RIC in Moria, or face closure. However, no

<http://mindigital.gr/index.php/%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%86%CF%85%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C-%CE%B6%CE%AE%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B1-refugee-crisis/2378-national-situational-picture-regarding-the-islands-at-eastern-aegean-sea-15-06-2018>

⁹ MSF, Overcrowded, dangerous and insufficient access to healthcare in Moria: <https://www.msf.org/greece-overcrowded-dangerous-and-insufficient-access-healthcare-moria>

further measures were taken.¹⁰ The deplorable conditions aggravated the mental health of the population on the island. According to an International Rescue Committee (IRC) report from September 2018, 30 percent of the people they cared at its mental health and psycho-social support centre in Lesvos have attempted suicide, and 60 percent have considered attempting suicide.¹¹ Doctors without Borders reported in the same month an “unprecedented health and mental health emergency” in Moria and said child refugees in particular “are increasingly attempting suicide, self-harming or having suicidal thoughts”.¹²

Conditions deteriorated in the winter because of a lack of heated accommodation and insulation. During the winter, the average temperature dropped frequently below zero in the island. 2019, was the third year in a row that many people are living in tents during the winter. People created open fires to keep warm in the winter, with the burning of plastic bags and bottles creating a dangerous, smoky, acrid atmosphere.¹³ In some cases, asylum seekers developed mental health problems after arriving in Moria because of the squalid living conditions, overcrowding, and the long wait for their asylum claim to be processed.¹⁴

Security gaps continued to remain an issue of concern. A survey by Refugee Rights Europe in June 2018 found that almost two-thirds (65.7%) of respondents said they ‘never feel safe’ inside Moria, rising to 78% among children living in the camp. The NGO conducted a survey with more than 300 asylum seekers hosted in the hotspot on the island of Lesvos. According to the report, “the lack of safety and security was a major concern among all of the respondents, and particularly so at Moria, with [two-third of the respondents] saying they ‘never feel safe’ inside the camps and another [one-fifth] that they ‘do not feel very safe’”. Almost half of the respondents experienced some form of police violence, too.¹⁵

UNHCR had released a statement citing the heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence to which refugee women and children are exposed, due to inadequate security and

¹⁰ <https://www.euro2day.gr/news/highlights/article-news/1637145/epimenei-h-perifereia-voreioy-aigaioy-na-mpei-loyketo-sth-moria.html>

¹¹ International Rescue Committee, Unprotected, unsupported, uncertain: <https://www.rescue.org/report/unprotected-unsupported-uncertain>

¹² MSF, Self-harm and attempted suicides increasing for child refugees in Lesvos: <https://www.msf.org/child-refugees-lesbos-are-increasingly-self-harming-and-attempting-suicide>

¹³ OXFAM, Vulnerable and abandoned: https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/2019-01_greece_media_briefing_final.pdf

¹⁴ Report of the Commissioner For Human Rights of the Council Of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, following her visit to Greece from 25 to 29 June 2018: <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-the-visit-to-greece-from-25-to-29-june2018-by-dunja-mijatov/16808ea5bd>

¹⁵ Refugee Rights Europe, An island in despair: http://refugeerights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/RRE_AnIslandInDespair.pdf

overcrowded conditions. Overcrowding in the RIC increased the risk of sexual and gender based violence significantly as single women are often not accommodated separately. Reports of sexual harassment in Moria were particularly high. According to UNHCR, *“bathrooms and latrines are no-go zones after dark for women or children, unless they are accompanied. Even bathing during day time can be dangerous. (..) Although there are police patrols, these remain insufficient, particularly at night, and don’t cover extended areas adjacent to the RICs, where people stay in tents without any security presence.”*¹⁶

During the reporting period, clashes between the RIC’s residents of different national or ethnic groups have been noted. Most incidents seem to be created as a direct result of the overcrowding, the living conditions and the containment policy. Local communities have also organized several rallies. The local communities have been protesting against the containment policy and have been demanding faster decongestion of the overcrowded hotspot. Residents also have been expressing concerns about safety and on the impact on tourism.

The overcrowding of asylum seekers on the island also has also contributed to the rise of xenophobic rhetoric and hate crime incidents. An increase in outbreaks of racist attitudes has been recorded by the Racist Violence Recording Network in its Annual Report for 2017 and Annual Report for 2018. As reported by the Network, *“the assaults that took place on April 2018 in Sappho square in Mytilene, also have features of a structured organization. According to victims of that night, there were dozens of men and women among the perpetrators who had covered their features and they were throwing rocks, bottles and objects ablaze. Extremist groups infiltrated and took advantage of that gathering of refugees and residents of Lesbos and they brutally attacked refugees, including several young children. It is therefore confirmed that the attraction of members from extremist groups is motivated by the tensions created as a result of the management of refugee and migrant flows. The Network underlines the link between the rise in xenophobic trends and racist behaviour and the overcrowding of refugees over a long period of time on the islands, as a result of the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement”*. The Hellenic League for Human Rights issued a statement with regards to the racist events that took place in Sappho square, urging the authorities to take measures in order to avoid further social destabilization and rise of far

¹⁶ UNHCR, Refugee women and children face heightened risk of sexual violence amid tensions and overcrowding at reception facilities on Greek islands: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2018/2/5a7d67c4b/refugee-women-children-face-heightened-risk-sexual-violence-amid-tensions.html>

right expressions.¹⁷ The Racist Violence Recording Network has also stressed the link between the rise in xenophobic trends and racist behaviour and the overcrowding of refugees over a long period of time on the islands, as a result of the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement'.¹⁸ A monument dedicated to refugees who perished at sea was also destroyed by a far-right group on Lesbos, local journalists were threatened for their positive coverage of refugee issues, while local residents attacked asylum seekers hosted at the RIC.¹⁹

The Commissioner of Human Rights of the Council of Europe referred to this critical issue in her report for Greece, noting that the considerable pressure placed put on the islands by the presence of asylum seekers in numbers exceeding three to four times the capacity of the facilities in which they are sheltered generates a growing exasperation, occasionally exploited by far-right groups inciting to violence against migrants.²⁰

Identification of vulnerable people

The vulnerability screening plays a crucial role in the asylum procedure. Asylum seekers who have not been identified as vulnerable fall under the fast-track border procedure. Vulnerable people instead have their asylum claim examined under the normal procedure, their asylum application is examined on the merits and have their geographical restriction lifted. Most importantly, vulnerabilities are linked to the reasons why a person fled their country of origin. In the case of a survivor of torture, as was the case in the majority of the cases we undertook it can be important for the credibility of their claim to be officially identified as vulnerable.

¹⁷ Hellenic League for Human Rights press release with regards to the racist attacks on Sappho square: <https://www.hlhr.gr/%cf%83%cf%87%ce%b5%cf%84%ce%b9%ce%ba%ce%ac-%ce%bc%ce%b5-%cf%84%ce%b9%cf%82-%cf%81%ce%b1%cf%84%cf%83%ce%b9%cf%83%cf%84%ce%b9%ce%ba%ce%ad%cf%82-%ce%b5%cf%80%ce%b9%ce%b8%ce%ad%cf%83%ce%b5%ce%b9%cf%82/>

¹⁸ Racist Violence Recording Network, *Annual Report 2017*, Greece, available at: http://rvrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Report_2017eng.pdf

¹⁹ RSA, Rise of xenophobic and racist incidents in the past 6 months-a timeline: <https://rsaegrean.org/en/rise-of-xenophobic-and-racist-incidents-in-the-past-6-months-a-timeline/>

²⁰ Report of the Commissioner For Human Rights of the Council Of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, following her visit to Greece from 25 to 29 June 2018: <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-the-visit-to-greece-from-25-to-29-june-2018-by-dunja-mijatov/16808ea5bd>

The vulnerability assessment could take weeks or sometimes months. The availability of medical staff was another critical element as interviews were postponed if a vulnerability assessment had not been carried out. According to FRA *“The time it takes to assess if a person is or is not vulnerable under Greek law varies considerably depending on the number of new arrivals, but also on the availability of professionals and interpreters. Insufficient number of doctors, psychologists (but also lack of space for them to have confidential interviews and examinations) as well as significant delays in recruiting interpreters limit the impact of these measures, leading to months of delays in some hotspots.”*

The identification of vulnerability took place either by the RIS prior to the registration of the asylum application, or during the asylum procedure. The medical screening and the psycho-social assessment was performed by the Ministry of Health’s National Health Organization (EODY). The vulnerability template holds three levels of vulnerability: “(A) High vulnerability”, “(B) Medium vulnerability” and “(C) No vulnerability”. In Lesbos, the screening procedure and the identification of the vulnerability changed several times during 2018, creating uncertainty and confusion.²¹ In addition, during the reporting period the National Health Organization (EODY) faced a severe shortage of medical and psycho-social staff qualified to carry out the vulnerability assessments. Severe shortages of staff were recorded during August, September and October 2018. A military doctor was placed at the RIC’s clinic in order to assess the health conditions of more than 10,000 people accommodated in the RIC. Some of the cases were referred to the local hospital of Mytilene, which provided an appointment 4 to 5 months later. This led to the asylum procedure being initiated without the applicants’ vulnerability having been assessed. In November 2018, vulnerability assessments had not taken place at all for at least a month. This situation created tensions and insecurity in the premises of the RIC. The absence of medical capacity has prolonged the waiting time for the conduction of the vulnerability assessment, especially due to absence of personnel mandated not only to conduct vulnerability screenings but also signing the documents certifying such vulnerability. In addition, asylum seekers’ interviews with EASO were suspended due to the absence of the screening procedure. As a result, large numbers of extremely vulnerable people have been forced to stay for longer periods of times, sometimes many months, in inappropriate facilities. At the end of May 2019, the situation at

²¹ OXFAM, Vulnerable and abandoned: https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/2019-01_greece_media_briefing_final.pdf

the RIC of Moria was slightly improved. The EODY CLINIC operated with the presence of 2 doctors, 2 cultural mediators, 8 nurses, 2 psychologists and 1 social worker.²²

In practice, vulnerable asylum seekers stayed in the hotspots even after their geographical restriction was lifted due to lack of sufficient facilities in the mainland. In 2018, the Greek authorities transferred 29.000 vulnerable people to the mainland, the majority of whom were women and children.²³ Transfers of vulnerable people to the mainland continued in 2019, however, as new people continue to arrive on the island, these transfers did not bring down the overall number of asylum seekers in the hotspot.

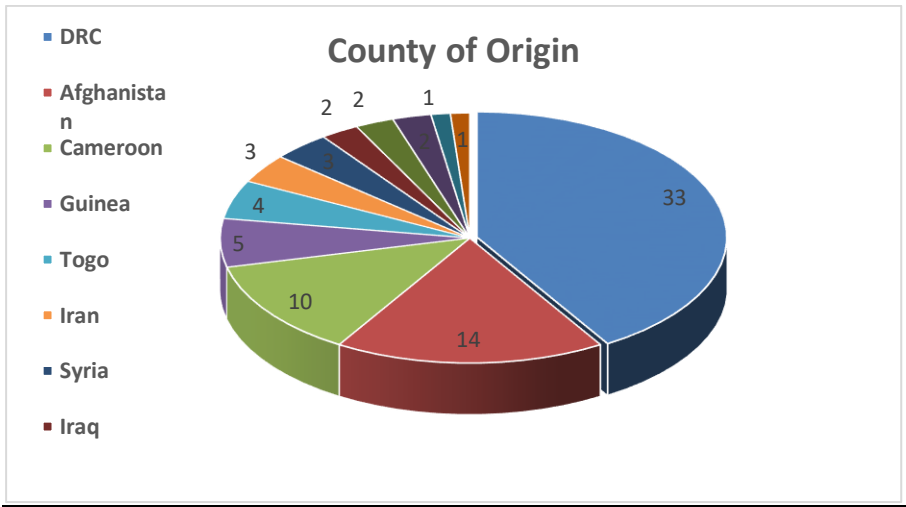
Asylum procedure and Legal support

Despite the introduction of the state-run legal aid scheme at second instance, the number of lawyers and legal aid organizations operating on the island remained insufficient to address the needs of asylum seekers. Furthermore, during the course of the program we have witnessed convoluted and constant changing practices and procedures. This situation made the already complicated asylum procedure extremely convoluted and led to frustration and anxiety among the people of concern. It also failed to guarantee respect for the applicants' rights. In September 2017, the Greek Asylum Service created its own registry of lawyers for the provision of legal assistance in appeal procedures. Despite the efforts state-funded legal aid remains inadequate. During the reporting period there was only one state-funded lawyer on Lesbos and for some period none. An Inter-Ministerial Decision signed in February 2019 reduced the requirements for lawyers to apply and raised lawyers' compensation.

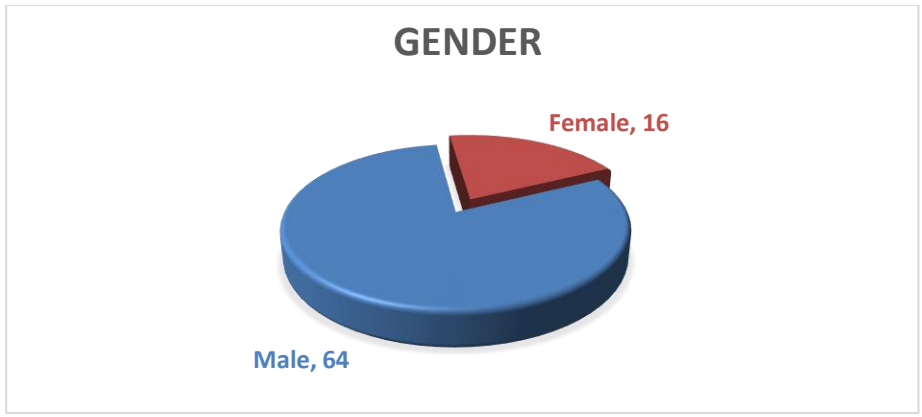
²² RSA, Structural failure: Why Greece's reception system failed to provide sustainable solutions: <https://rsaeean.org/en/why-greece%CE%84s-reception-systems-failed-to-provide-durable-solutions/>

²³ FRA, Opinion of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights on fundamental rights in the 'hotspots' set up in Greece and Italy: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-opinion-5-2016-hotspots_en.pdfhttps://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-opinion-hotspots-update-03-2019_en.pdf

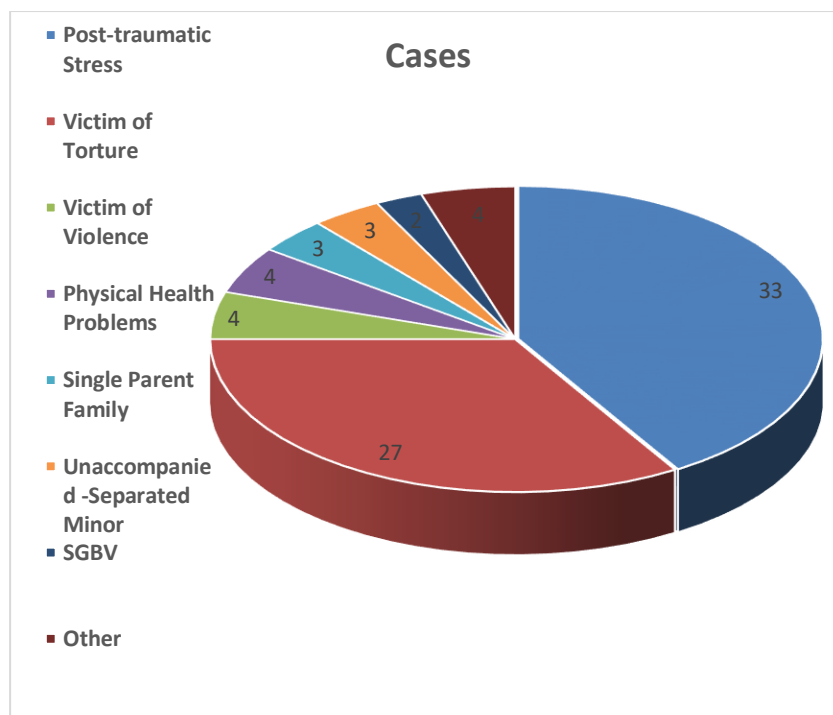
The Hellenic League for Human Rights undertook 80 cases and assisted 113 persons in total. The majority originated from DRC, Afghanistan and Cameroon.



Most of them were single men, while almost all the women asylum seekers were together their families or next-of-kin.



All the cases that HLHR undertook concerned the asylum application of vulnerable people. Many have been widely exposed to traumatic events, which increased their vulnerability to mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. Having fled from violence, applicants of international protection explained that they faced further violence and trauma during their journey to Greece.



Due to a lack of staff, many people who arrived in Lesvos during our intervention had their first asylum interview scheduled for late 2019 and 2020. In addition, many first instance interviews that were scheduled during our range of operation were cancelled and rescheduled, due to the referral of the beneficiaries to accommodation facilities on the mainland. From 28-03-2019 to the day the project was finalized, the Regional Asylum Office in Lesvos did not provide information to lawyers on the progress of the asylum cases of their beneficiaries. It was indicated by the Asylum Service's personnel that the asylum applicant had to be present as the only way to be informed about the decision on his/her application for international protection. Given that the majority of our beneficiaries were vulnerable asylum seekers that had been moved to accommodation facilities on the mainland, there was no way of being informed on the progress of these cases. 45 cases out of the 80 cases that the League undertook concerned the lifting of geographical restriction, so that people can travel freely to the mainland. Other cases concerned the re-examination of the vulnerability status of the asylum seekers and in particular the modification from "medium" to "high" vulnerability. During the project timeline, six people were granted international protection status. With the closing of the project, all cases had been referred to organizations that provide legal aid.

Conclusions - Position statements of the League

For the past three years, since the adoption of the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016, the Hellenic League for Human Rights has been repeatedly stating that the EU-Turkey Statement is undermining human rights and Europe's fundamental principles. HLHR stressed the danger that the implementation of the so called agreement would entail not only the fragmentation of the right to asylum but also the undermining of the basic principles of the rule of law. At the same time, asylum seekers are forced to live under inhuman and deplorable conditions on the Greek islands. As briefly illustrated, the situation for asylum seekers on Lesbos remains critical. In this context Hellenic League for Human Rights is calling on the Greek government, with the support of the European Commission and other EU member states to:

- Suspend the implementation of the EU - Turkey statement.
- Suspend the imposition of geographical restriction to the freedom of movement of asylum seekers on the eastern Aegean islands. Following the completion of first reception procedures, transfer asylum seekers, without delay, to dignified accommodation facilities.
- Improve living conditions at the RICs, by ensuring safe and dignified accommodation for asylum seekers, the timely registration of newcomers and their subsequent transfer to appropriate accommodation in the mainland.
- Ensure that the RICs in all five islands have the proper number of expert staff, in order for the procedures to swiftly completed.
- Increase long-term reception and accommodation capacity on the mainland.
- Urgently deploy expert staff in the RAO in all five islands, while ensuring that all asylum seekers have access to proper information and legal support, both during registration and prior to their interview.