

FENIX



OVERVIEW

The last quarter of 2021 emphasized that, as legal organizations have continuously stated, rather than a problem of capacity, there are structural and political issues that underly the punitive and dire context for asylum seekers and refugees in Greece.

This period saw a massive decrease of the population in Mavrovouni Camp; reaching its lowest point in December with 2000 residents. During this period decisions were notified to hundreds by post or email. Following a positive or second negative decision, people are no longer eligible for cash assistance, food or accommodation. NGOs stated that approximately 60% of the population in camps in the mainland have no access to food.

Regardless of the decrease in population, restrictions from authorities to distribution of legal information for asylum seekers in quarantine continued, as well as fast tracked interviews only days after their release without proper access to medical and vulnerability screening or legal aid. New difficulties in accessing legal aid included restrictions in movement for the non-vaccinated (affecting newly arrived refugees) and no money for transport due to the suspension of cash assistance for 3 months.

Asylum seekers continue to be rejected based on admissibility (Turkey as a safe country) adding more rejected asylum seekers to the list of those left in limbo: left without access to accommodation, food, cash assistance or their asylum claims assessed, but also not returned to Turkey.

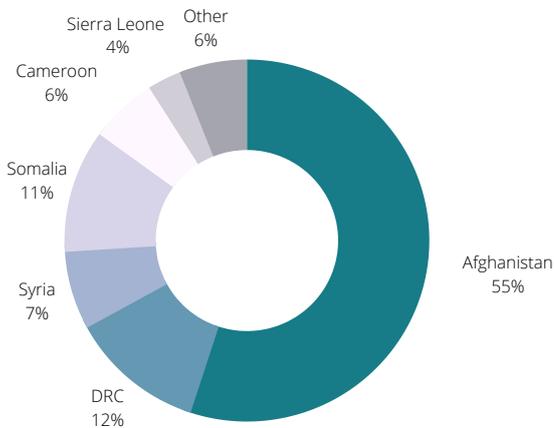
Due to continuous issues with the screening and identification of vulnerabilities, many of the Mavrovouni residents have medical, mental health and other vulnerabilities for which there is no sufficient or appropriate support available in Lesvos. In November, the ESTIA accommodation program of the government was shut down, leaving no housing alternative for the vulnerable on the island.

Although many in camp have been moved to containers, conditions remain dire in winter months; with electricity issues that affect heating and hot water. In this context, feelings of hopelessness and uncertainty for the future have had a detrimental effect on the mental health of those who are left behind; reflected in the worsening of symptoms observed by mental health practitioners.

Throughout this period, steady arrivals continued, including a boat that arrived straight into Mavrovouni Camp carrying 32 people. In the context of strong allegations against the authorities of conducting pushbacks to people trying to reach safety in Greece, asylum seekers arriving to Lesvos generally scattered as soon as they arrived, due to fear of being forced into lifeliferrafts and abandoned at sea.

Between 22-25 December, the Aegean Sea saw its deadliest week in years: there were three different shipwrecks (near Paros, Santorini and Prasonisi) with 160 people rescued, at least 31 dead and many still missing.

OUR CLIENTS



Countries of origin of our current clients
(total of 230 people)

'Other' includes Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ghana, Haiti, Iran, Nigeria and Sudan.



Survivors of Gender Based Violence



Victims of Torture and Violence



Unrecognized Unaccompanied Minors



People with disabilities, severe medical or mental health conditions

OUR WORK IN NUMBERS



We took on **24** new clients for holistic legal aid services. An extra **41** people received information and guidance as part of our walk-in service



We held **182** legal sessions in **6** different languages



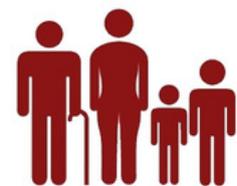
46 cases are being represented by Greek attorneys at different stages of the procedure



We hosted **18** group MHPSS sessions and held **97** individual sessions



We published **3** reports and **7** press releases advocating for positive change at the local, national, and European level



97 people from **5** different NGOs received capacity bridging sessions

HOLISTIC LEGAL AID



Our holistic approach to legal aid not only allows us to provide a more comprehensive service to our clients, but also increases the impact of our work. The case of A is an example of this.

A had just turned 16 years old when Fenix first met him in the camp. He had been incorrectly registered as an adult, a common procedural violation which has grave consequences for children.

The **Greek Legal Team** immediately began working on ensuring A would be rightfully recognised as an unaccompanied minor by the Greek authorities. They successfully postponed his interview several times so the assessment would take place before.

A was eventually registered as a minor, which allowed him to be transferred to a safe shelter with other minors. This also allowed the **Family Reunification Team** to proceed with an application for A. to be reunited with his family in the Netherlands.

The **Protection Team** assigned him a protection officer and screened him for vulnerabilities linked to his medical conditions. They worked alongside the **Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support team** to provide him with adequate mental health support.

A's protection officer and psychologist were able to contribute expert reports in support of A's family reunification application. These are crucial as they provided qualified, professional opinions for A's Best Interest Assessment, one of the requirements for a family reunification application involving a minor.

The **Family Reunification Team** built a relationship of trust with A and his family member in the Netherlands, eventually gathering enough documents to prove not only their relation, but that it was in A's best interest to live with his family in the Netherlands. Due to A's delayed age assessment by the Greek authorities, Fenix had to submit his application under the discretionary article, rather than the more straightforward article normally used for unaccompanied minors. The evidence gathered allowed the team to argue strong humanitarian grounds using both European and Dutch caselaw and A's testimony; and to justify applying for family reunification outside the regulation's deadline.

A was finally accepted and is awaiting his transfer. Two other children in the same situation will also be reunited with their family members after Fenix's intervention!

ADVOCACY & STRATEGY



A client after an appointment in the garden of our office

If you want to make a structural impact, you need to create a pattern of intervention.
- Dimitra Linardaki, Greek Attorney at Fenix

One area in which Fenix is aiming to create structural impact is the situation for single women from Somalia. Since the implementation of a Joint Ministerial Decision in June, which declared Turkey a safe country for Somalis, they no longer have direct access to the right to seek asylum in Greece ([read more](#) in our report on the JMD).

This while most of our female clients from Somalia have fled severe forms of (gender based) violence in their country of origin and in Turkey. Our Greek Attorneys represent them from the moment they arrive and together with the other teams they advocate for these clients to get their asylum claims heard and to have access their rights. An example of our intervention is the case of N.

Fenix's outreach team met N during the screening of new arrivals, and it was immediately evident how vulnerable she was. We took her case on and after an holistic assessment we created an action plan. With the extremely limited time available - her interview was only 6 days away - the main aim was to get her vulnerabilities recognized in order to ensure access to medical care, proper housing and, most importantly, the asylum procedure.

The protection team arranged an assessment with EODY - the national authority responsible for officially recognizing vulnerabilities. N. was prepared and accompanied to her assessment, and EODY recognized her as a survivor of psychological and sexual abuse and FGM, which had a big impact on her case.

The legal team managed to get a postponement of the interview, giving N more time to prepare. They also successfully requested the lifting of her geographical restriction in order for her to move to the mainland, where she is living in safe housing and where specialized medical care and other forms of support are more widely available.

Besides the direct impact on N's situation, by consistently intervening in these cases we aim to create a pattern that shows the structural problem with subjecting Somali women to an admissibility interview, and emphasizes that they should directly have access to the asylum procedure.

All our Somali single woman clients have passed their admissibility interview and have access to the asylum procedure!

ADVOCACY & CAPACITY BRIDGING



Meeting of Members of European Parliament with Legal Organizations in the European Parliament Offices in Athens.

Advocacy

During this period we intensified our advocacy efforts, addressing some of the most pressing issues to relevant stakeholders. For a full overview of our publications, visit [our website](#).

One of the main issues addressed was the lack of access to food and cash assistance to thousands of people since October, after the Greek authorities implemented eligibility regulations and took over the cash program from UNHCR without having a plan for the continuation of the program. Shortly after NGOs published an open letter and press release, the Greek government successfully posted a call for tender for an organization to restart the cash program. Also EU Commissioner Johansson replied, reiterating Greece's responsibility under EU law to ensure people receive the basic necessities such as food, and to implement adequate pathways for integration.

Another concern is that asylum seekers from five nationalities do not have access to an assessment of their claim on the merits, since Turkey is considered a safe third country. Turkey is not readmitting people since March 2020, and the Greek authorities have confirmed that they have suspended the requests for Turkey to take back rejected asylum seekers. This leaves thousands of people in limbo, an issue which we brought to light via an urgent [press release](#).

The same issue was addressed by our Executive Director and Legal Coordinator during a round table discussion at the European Parliament offices in Athens in the context of the mission of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) to Greece. Together with other legal actors, they presented some of the main problems of the Greek asylum procedure and its non-compliance with EU law. The Committee was very receptive and concerned about the situation in Greece and we look forward to continuing working together.

After several meetings with important stakeholders, we have published a policy brief on the issue of relocations from Greece, showing the need to continue with relocations and recommending efficient ways to do so. We have presented the brief to all stakeholders involved, including the European Commission, EASO, UNHCR and relevant MEPs and embassies.

Capacity Bridging

The capacity bridging sessions continue to be in big demand. In this period, we held 6 sessions, to 5 organizations with 97 people attending. 96% of the surveyed attendees say they understand the asylum procedure and their role in the procedure better after the session. This has greatly improved the way we can work together towards creating the best possible outcome for the people we work for.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



A client from Cameroon celebrating his positive asylum decision with his Protection and Legal Officer .

Ensuring client's access to their rights and achieving structural change is our dual mission, that involves the daily collaboration of all teams towards implementing our mission. Learn about some of our impact and highlights of the past three months, from increased well-being of clients, access to medical and mental health care, to organisational growth, impactful advocacy efforts, and successful asylum decisions.

We have been able to restart group information sessions in the camp for new arrivals. We provided them with information on the asylum procedure and their rights, in an effort overcome the general lack of information for people newly arrived to the camp and subjected to interviews only days after.

An attendee from the women's mental health empowerment group told us how the groups impacted her well-being:

"I was in bad situation before coming here, then I realized I was not the only one with problems in my life and being able to speak here as a group changed my way of thinking and helped me be more positive"

Three Greek Attorneys joined our Greek Legal team which now consists of 6 Greek Attorneys. This has increased our capacity to represent clients at all stages of the procedure in order to access their rights. At the same time, their interventions in different stages of the procedure are aimed at creating structural change of these procedures.

In November we launched our new website! The website reflects the ways in which we combine holistic legal aid with advocacy for lasting change, allows people to stay up to date on the context and learn about ways to support our work. Visit our website [here](#).

After being represented by Greek Attorneys, several clients from countries with low recognition rates such as Nigeria and Cameroon have been granted refugee status. Being from countries that are generally seen as 'safe' creates a higher burden to prove that a person is at risk if they would be returned, a burden that is difficult to surpass without a lawyer.

As a consequence of a violent attack, a client had lost his hearing in one ear, severely impacting his daily life. Through our protection team, he got an appointment with an ear doctor. Through tight collaborations, we then ensured he could get a hearing aid. When the client received his hearing aid he told us; "Thank you to Fenix for taking a disabled man and healing him".

FINANCIALS

In the fourth quarter of 2021, our team consisted of 34 volunteers and staff, of which 22 are long term, including our 9 Greek Staff.

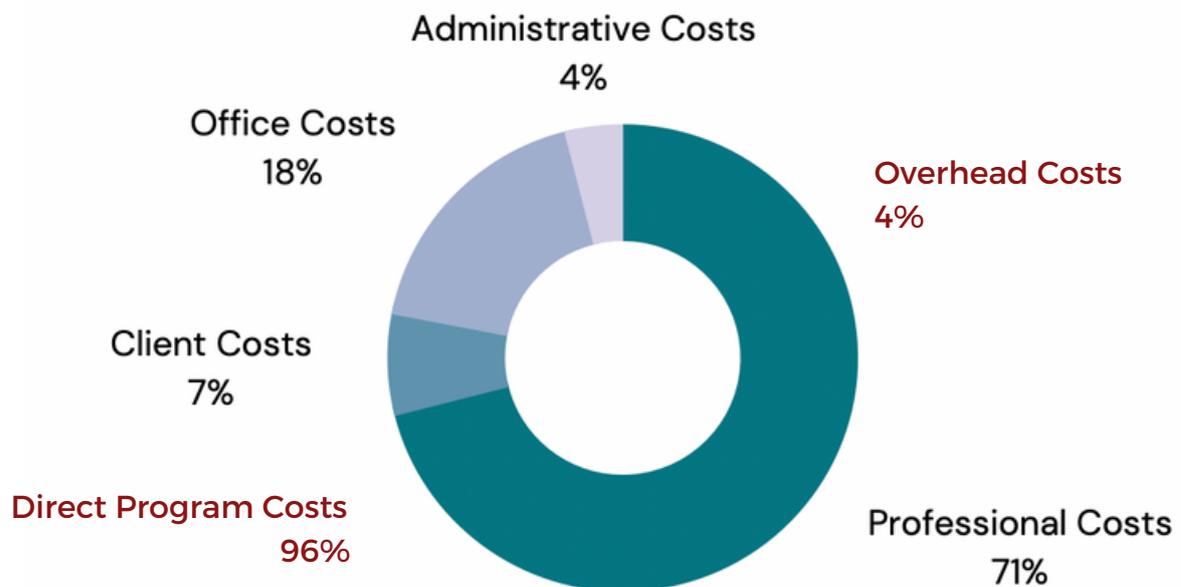
The support we received from our donors allowed us to **continue our services to 500 people.**

96%

Program Costs

4%

Overhead Costs



Expenses Breakdown by Category

This quarter our professional costs increased with the incorporation of 1 additional Greek psychologist and 3 new Greek attorneys. We also incorporated an additional long term protection volunteer and a Somali/Arabic translator.

Our priority continues to be the building of our capacity and expertise through investing in our long term and professional staff.

With these new incorporations, our team now comprises 22 long term staff, which we hope to be able to retain throughout 2022.

96% of the money donated to Fenix was used to provide services to our clients. Every Euro donated counts towards continuing our Holistic Legal Aid Project.

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