



FENIX HUMANITARIAN LEGAL AID



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

The Life Of A Refugee

In search of safety, I fled my land's strife,
To foreign shore, seeking a new life.
Rejected, I face a relentless quest for proof,
While injustice and fear erode my truth.

In camps on distant islands, I wait,
Fed sparingly, trapped by fate.
Denied work, my days stretch late,
In limbo's grasp, hope dissipates.

Stranded, I long for asylum's call,
But the path forward remains a wall.
Each day a battle, standing tall,
Yet the future remains an empty hall.

by Abdulai Jalloh
(Fenix client)



CONTENT

About Us

Mission and Vision

Values

Projects

Legal Empowerment & Protection Support

Impact Stories

Holistic Support for LGBTQ+ refugees

Indicators and Numbers

Population Supported

Strategic Legal Representation

Impact Stories

Population Supported

Advocacy and Strategy

Indicators and Numbers for Strategic Representation and Advocacy

Capacity Bridging

Indicators and Numbers

Finances



ABOUT US - MISSION & VISION

Our vision is a world in which every person who is forced to flee has effective, dignified and safe access to the fundamental right to international protection.

We work towards this with a dual mission:



Create positive impact for people who seek asylum in terms of their well-being, empowerment and access to rights.



Advocate for a structurally more fair and just asylum system in Greece and Europe at large.

FENIX
HUMANITARIAN LEGAL AID

ABOUT US - VALUES

Holistic Approach to Legal Aid



We see people as more than 'legal cases' but approach them as individuals with their own dreams, hopes, skills and challenges that need to be addressed in a way that is comprehensive and connected, allowing for a more dignified and effective legal service.

Empowerment



In the highly disempowering context of the asylum system, we centralise empowerment by acknowledging and respecting each individual's agency and choice-making throughout their journey, and offering them the tools and knowledge to make their own decisions about what is best for them.

Trauma informed



Each client has a different history of trauma that plays a role in their lives, and the symptoms of such trauma may take many different forms. We provide our service in a trauma-informed manner, ensuring a safe space, centralising the voice of the client, working together to understand their story, and empowering the client.

Professionalism

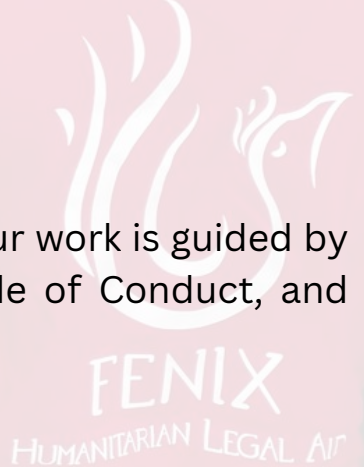


We strive to deliver our service at the highest quality. Our work is guided by ethical and professional standards, policies and a Code of Conduct, and provided by highly skilled and trained staff.

Community Based and Led



It is crucial for us that the communities affected by the disempowering and inhumane asylum system, and who are using our services are directly involved in the design and development of our project. We engage the communities through focus groups, as community focal points and cultural mediators, and by regularly and actively seeking feedback on our projects.



ABOUT US - PROJECTS

Legal Empowerment and Protection Support

The huge lack of information within the context of the Greek asylum system has adverse impact on people's physical and mental wellbeing, while at the same time forming a barrier for people to access basic services and legal recognition as refugees. We step in this gap by offering critical information and guidance during individual and group sessions as well as drop-in moments, directly inside the Lesvos camp.

LGBTQ+ Holistic Support

People across the world are forced to flee facing persecution based on their marginalised sexual orientation and / or gender identity. As part of our wider legal empowerment project, Fenix specialises in providing comprehensive services, including legal and protection, to these individuals who face particular challenges on their journey to a life in safety.

Strategic Legal Representation

Amid a deeply broken asylum system, individuals often face serious rights violations and procedural injustices that only legal intervention can address. We represent clients throughout their asylum process, advocating for them at national and international courts and bodies to seek accountability and remedy for their situation.

Advocacy

Amplifying the experiences of people on the move, we advocate for a more just asylum system in Greece and Europe at large. We use a range of advocacy avenues, including by raising awareness among the public, through interventions to relevant law and policy makers, and by contribution to the production of knowledge and evidence.

Capacity Bridging

Rooted in a deep belief in ethical and rights based humanitarian work, we provide training on safeguarding and the asylum procedure to other actors to ensure other actors can better place their service in the wider context of refugee protection.

”

Fenix is the first organisation that asked me human questions and made me feel like they really care. They made me feel safe and supported.

– client from Somalia



LEGAL EMPOWERMENT AND PROTECTION SUPPORT



The huge lack of information within the context of the Greek asylum system has adverse impact on people's physical and mental wellbeing, while at the same time forming a barrier for people to access basic services and legal recognition as refugees. We step in this gap by offering critical information and guidance during individual and group sessions as well as drop-in moments, directly inside the Lesvos camp.

Thousands of people arrive to Lesvos in search of safety each year. Upon arrival, people with asylum claims enter an extremely complex, inaccessible and disempowering asylum system. Access to legal aid and information is crucial for them to be able to navigate their procedure and realise their rights, and this need is recognised by its establishment as a fundamental right in different laws and regulations. Yet, most individuals have little or no access to legal information, let alone aid throughout their procedure. This severe lack of information leads to a critically reduced chance to access international protection in several ways.

Combatting this gap of information through our activities on Lesvos has four main outcomes: 1) using knowledge as a tool for empowerment, we enhance people's ability and confidence to advocate for their rights, including the right be recognised as a refugee. 2) by helping people feel more in control over their procedure, we help reduce the stress and anxiety about the asylum procedure leading to an improved mental health. 3) We reduce reliance on, and spreading of, rumours that can be harmful for people's legal cases by ensuring access to accurate information. 4) We help people improve their well-being by enabling them to receive support for (mental) health challenges they may be facing, by connecting and accompanying them to essential services.

We operate directly inside the Mavrovouni camp and in community centers where we provide:

- Group and individual legal information sessions detailing different steps of the procedure
- Drop-in consultations for practical and 1-1 questions
- Referrals and accompaniment to services for well-being
- For the most vulnerable cases, we support in accessing documentation that helps evidence the asylum claim

We adopt a pro-active approach to our services. Instead of waiting for people to find out about our services, we conduct outreach every day to inform people about what we offer and invite them to our sessions. This has allowed us build a close connection and trust with the communities inside the camp, and has been critical in ensuring that people access the legal information timely during their extremely fast-tracked procedures.

"I had a lot of anxiety and panic attacks before, I was scared of people and I did not feel safe. But now I feel safe and comfortable thanks to Fenix's support. Fenix was really good at describing the process to me. It was really important for me to know what to expect from the interview, including the questions, the setup, the way the room looks, and who will be there. From knowing this, I felt much more confident to go to the interview."

- woman client from Afghanistan



IMPACT STORIES

Client from Syria

As our team went through the camp to invite newly arrived people to join our information session, they met a man from Syria who told us he did not intend to go to his asylum interview. We invited him to our space and explained the consequences and risk of missing his interview, so that he could make an informed decision on whether to go or not. During the session, he realised the importance of going but told us that his interview was actually that same day, and he had already missed the bus to go there. We accompanied him to the asylum office and made sure he could still attend his interview with a bus leaving in just 20 minutes.

We used that time to inform him about his rights and what happens during the interview. This is particularly important for people from Syria, because they will undergo an admissibility interview as Greece considers Türkiye safe for people from Syria. The client had been coming back multiple times since, so we could also support him with some next steps. After some time, he came running to our container in the camp to tell us that he received his refugee status decision! He is now waiting for his travel documents so he can travel to see his family members who have settled in other EU countries, and who he hasn't seen for years.

Impact of trauma-informed care

We have been supporting a young man from Kuwait who is stateless. This client's asylum interview was scheduled for over a month from his arrival, which has been a source of considerable stress for him at a time when everyone has their interview within a few days. Besides, he suffered from pre-existing mental health challenges that he asked support with. Acknowledging that individuals may not share everything with us immediately, given that we are still strangers to them, we were glad he felt comfortable enough to make this request.

In light of this, besides offering him sessions to help him understand the asylum procedure and his rights, and prepare for his interview, a significant part of our service to him has been collaborating with him to ensure improved ability to manage his mental health. This consisted of helping him access regular mental health support externally, but also during our own sessions with him, we have familiarised him with breathing exercises to help manage panic attacks and anxiety.

This ongoing support not only aided his mental well-being but also strengthened his ability to handle the asylum interview process. Finally, he managed to effectively express his claim during his interview and he got recognised as a refugee!

”

I'm really relieved I spoke to you, otherwise my head would have exploded from thinking!

– man from Syria who attended a legal empowerment session



HOLISTIC SUPPORT FOR LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS

Persecution of people from the LGBTQ+ community is increasing at a rapid speed and across the world, forcing many to flee in search of a place where they can live freely and safely. As part of our wider legal empowerment project, Fenix specialises in providing comprehensive services, including legal and protection, to these individuals who face particular challenges on their journey to a life in safety.

Building on our in-house expertise, we provide tailored and in depth support to people with marginalised SOGI. People from this community face additional legal and protection challenges in their pursuit of a life of safety in Greece. These challenges include continued persecution in the setting of camps, a higher burden in expressing their highly individualised claim after often having been forced to hide their identity for many years, and facing highly problematic and even illegal questions during their interview.

Our support to individuals from the LGBTQ+ community consists of several sessions of interview preparation in the safety of our office, helping people to express their need for international protection. We also make a collaborative plan aimed at gathering evidence that can help them strengthen their claim, including medical evidence, reports from mental health professionals, and information about their country of origin. We connect clients to the LGBTQ+ networks and where possible ensure access to safe housing outside of the camp. As most people are facing ongoing persecution inside the camp, we offer food vouchers that ensure they don't have to face risks by queueing up in food lines.

Besides, we work closely together with the community to address issues that are bothering them, and use our platform to address these to authorities and the wider public, such as through [this letter](#) or [this report](#).

THE CASE OF ABDUL*

Abdul is a gay man from Sierra Leone, the country from which most of our current SOGIESC clients are forced to flee. After he was caught with his partner, he was severely abused and hospitalised. He managed to escape the hospital facing imprisonment directly after being released. Abdul fled to neighbouring Guinea, from where he was trafficked to Turkiye where he experienced further violence and exploitation.

When we met him, the trauma he had been through negatively impacted his ability to memorise what exactly happened, and he was not able to tell his story in a logical or comprehensive way – one of the most important things during the asylum interview.

We guided Abdul through telling his story in an effective way, but we also ensured his access to psychological care. Besides benefitting his well-being, this ensured Abdul could present evidence that his lowered ability to tell his story was related to what happened to him, strengthening and evidencing his claim.

Abdul received a positive decision, and has currently found his first job in a city in Greece, where he lives with others from the community.

”

Because of the information, I went into the interview confident. I felt prepared and all the stress and difficulties from the interview was numbed, like they were less, because of the preparation you gave me. It made it easier and the bad things hurt less

– attendee to individual
SOGIESC consultations

LEGAL EMPOWERMENT AND HOLISTIC LGBTQ+ SUPPORT IN NUMBERS*



2 3 2 1

TOTAL PEOPLE REACHED WITH EMPOWERMENT TOOLS

From **31** different nationalities and people in a situation of statelessness, through legal information and information on access to services



3 1 8

GROUP INFO SESSIONS

Offered inside the camp and community centers in 6 different languages, covering 90% of the population.



9 3 0

DROP-IN CONSULTATIONS

Individuals assisted in our container in camp with questions or follow-ups during our office hours



4 3 6

PROTECTION SUPPORT

436 people were supported with health navigation, referrals and accompaniment to different services including medical, accomodation and psychosocial.



7 9

TAILORED SUPPORT

Individualized support for 79 cases of asylum seekers with family members in other EU Member States, or a claim based on their SOGIESC



1 0 0 %

FEEL MORE CONFIDENT

All persons interviewed felt more prepared and confident to face their interview after our services.



9 1 %

HAS MORE KNOWLEDGE

91% of attendees we asked post attendance questions reported an increased understanding of the procedure after our services.



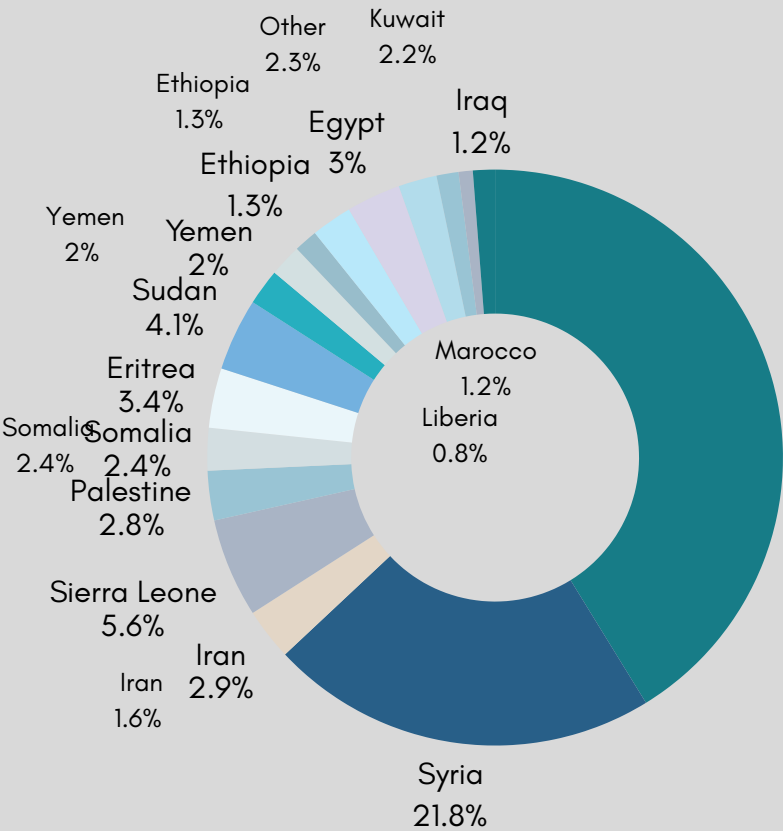
"I'm really relieved I spoke to you, otherwise my head would have exploded from thinking!" - client from Syria

"I'd like my friends to come to this session because it is really good. Now I feel more relaxed." - client from Afghanistan

Legal Empowerment & LGBTQ+ Holistic Support

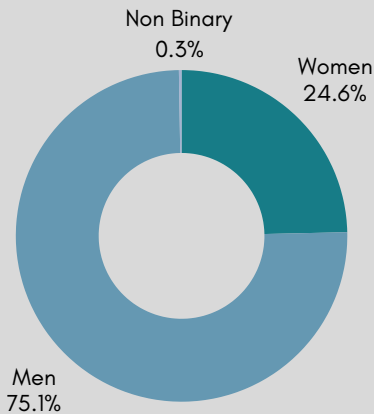
2321 CLIENTS SUPPORTED

NATIONALITIES

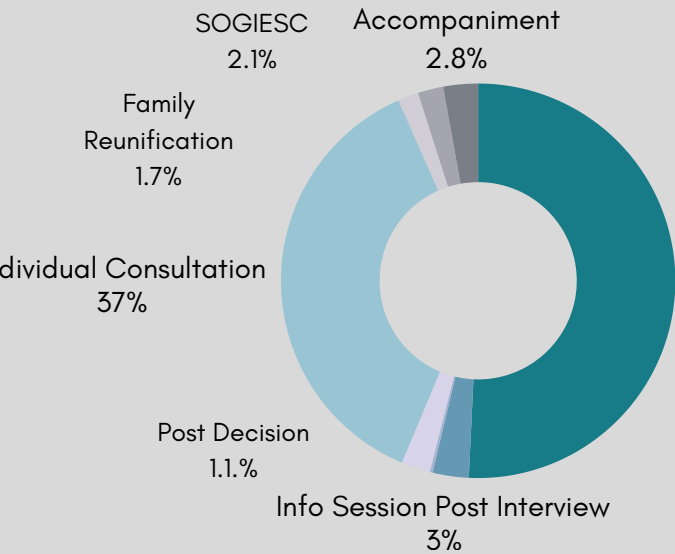


31 Countries of origin of our clients
(total of 2321 people)
'Other' includes: Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Haiti, Pakistan, Mali, South Sudan, DRC, Turkey, Cote D'Ivoire, Uzbekistan, Soyth Sudan and Lebanon.

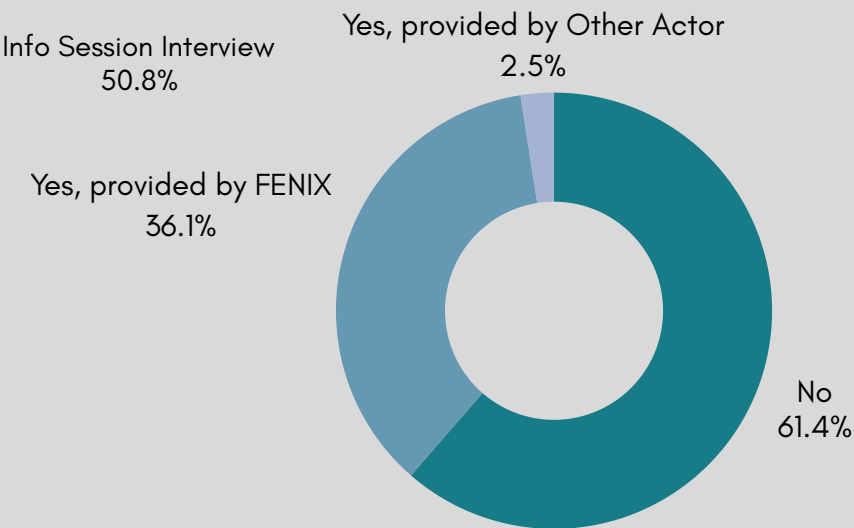
GENDER



TYPE OF SUPPORT PROVIDED



PRIOR ACCESS TO LEGAL INFO



”

I felt hopeless and alone, and had no belief in myself when I arrived. At Fenix there is always someone to give me a little push to follow up on things, they believe I can do that. That gave me hope and something to focus on.

STRATEGIC LEGAL REPRESENTATION



Amid a deeply broken asylum system, individuals often face serious rights violations and procedural injustices that only legal intervention can address. We represent clients throughout their asylum process, advocating for them at national and international courts and bodies to seek accountability and remedy for their situation.

People seeking safety in Greece face constant violations of their rights within the asylum procedure including minors being registered as adults, LGBTQ+ individuals being asked prohibited questions to 'determine' their sexual orientation, victims of torture and other types of violence not being recognised as vulnerable and thus not receiving special (procedural) guarantees, people with severe trauma reactions receiving rejections after not being able to effectively tell their stories, a lack of gender sensitivity with caseworkers, bureaucratic hurdles and many more.

Ultimately, this means that thousands of people who have fled violence and persecution are not able to receive legal recognition for their status as refugees, and are thus not able to build their lives in safety. They remain at risk of deportation back to the country they fled from, or spend years in protracted situations of legal limbo and marginalisation.

With our strategic legal representation efforts, we combine strategic litigation and representation of the asylum case of individuals at all stages of their procedure. As part of our holistic approach, besides addressing their legal challenges we ensure other issues such as medical, mental health or social that are creating challenges, are also addressed.

The outcomes we are working towards with this project are: 1) ensuring clients have a better understanding of their procedure, enabling them to effectively take next steps, 2) through accessing (mental) health services and by experiencing reduced stress and anxiety client's well-being is improved, 3) clients have increased access to their rights through legal interventions, 4) there is increased accountability and remedy for rights violations through strategic legal interventions.

Activities as part of this project include:

- Preparation for asylum interviews and submitting all relevant legal documentation and submissions.
- Ensuring access to medical and mental health, social support, education, integration and any other supportive services.
- Advocating for the client in front of domestic and international courts and other bodies, such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Greek Ombudsperson, the Committee Against Torture and Frontex Complaint Mechanisms.
- Intervening on behalf of the client to different authorities, including camp authorities and the Asylum Service

We focus this service on those with the most complex cases, ensuring they have a real chance at a life in safety.

STRATEGIC LEGAL REPRESENTATION IMPACT STORIES



15 years of Legal Limbo: Maria

Maria was born in Ethiopia, but she is stateless. She is a survivor of FGM, and was trafficked several times, the last time to Greece from Sudan. She arrived on Samos in 2008 where her trafficker soon disappeared, freeing her from years of abuse.

She met the father of her children in Greece, but he died tragically shortly after she got pregnant. During her pregnancy, Maria learned she was HVI positive and suffered from a thyroid condition. The twins, 11 years old, suffer from a speech disorder and a form of autism which has made their integration and learning difficult.

When Fenix undertook her case, Maria and her children had no legal status and had been in Greece for 15 years without proper support or care and without having received any legal guidance. Besides guaranteeing their access to medical care, we ensured that the children were enrolled in a specialized school.

Maria's lawyer submitted an annulment application against the wrongful rejection of her asylum application, and a subsequent asylum application, giving Maria and her children the status of asylum seekers again. As an asylum seeker, Maria became eligible for relocation and was selected to participate in a relocation scheme to France. We prepared her and assisted her during the relocation interview, submitting all the relevant documentation that would help make the case for Maria. France accepted to receive her and her children, who will be finding a new home in France very soon after years of destitution, violence and limbo in Greece.

Reunited with His Family: Baadi

Baadi* fled Syria, where he was subjected to severe forms of torture after he was imprisoned for his participation in demonstrations against the government. The torture impacted his mental health - when we met Baadi he was unable to take care of himself or understand where he was. He had lost his family members five years ago on their way to safety - they had since been able to settle in Germany.

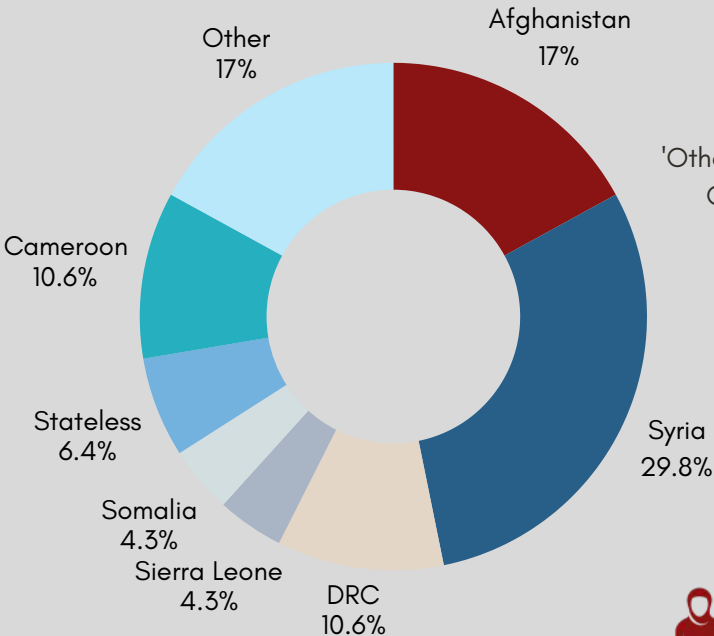
When we met Baadi, he had never received a decision on his initial asylum claim as the authorities deemed him unfit for the interview. He had thus been forced to live in the camp in conditions completely inadequate to his situation without receiving appropriate medical care for more than two years, further deteriorating his well-being.

When he became our client, his lawyer started the procedure for family reunification. They also applied for a reassessment of Baadi's vulnerabilities in order to get them properly recognised, and sent a submission to the Greek Ombudsman, alerting them to the shortcomings of the Greek authorities in providing Baadi with the conditions and care he has a right to based on his vulnerabilities. He was then transferred to a camp on the mainland with better care. Our team arranged Baadi's access to medical and mental health care that stabilised Baadi's health.

Finally, Baadi's family reunification request was accepted by Germany and after three years in legal limbo, Baadi was finally able to travel to Germany and reunite with his family.

Strategic Legal Representation

46 Clients represented



NATIONALITIES

'Other' includes Palestine, Eritrea, Gambia, Gahna, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

A total of 46 clients

VULNERABILITIES



Survivors of (gender based) violence

39%



Survivors of Torture

19%



People with disabilities, severe medical or mental health conditions

41%



LGBTQ+ individuals

4%



Survivors of forms of Modern Day Slavery

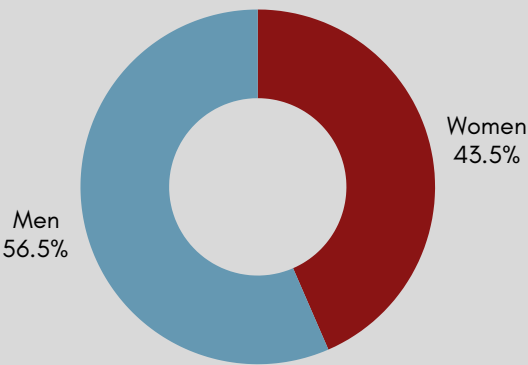
30%



Unaccompanied minors wrongfully registered as adults

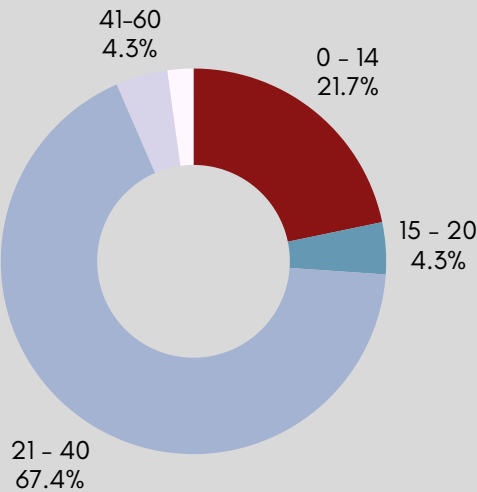
17%

GENDER

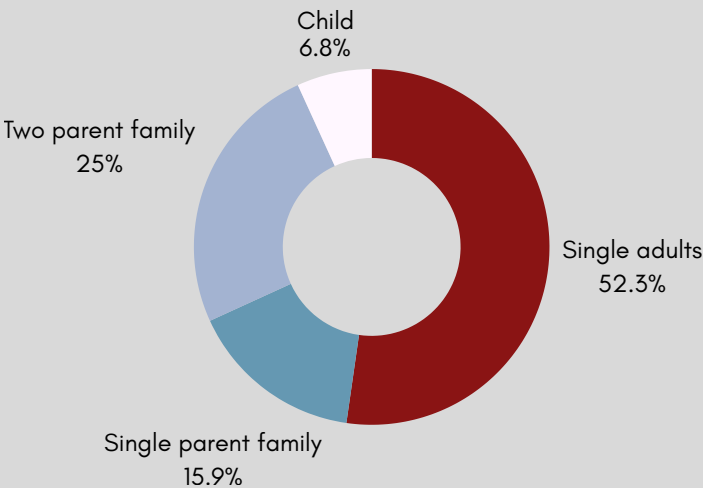


None of our clients identified outside of the gender binary when they received our service

AGES



FAMILY COMPOSITION





ADVOCACY

Lesvos team sharing experiences with journalists

Amplifying the experiences of people on the move, we advocate for a more just asylum system in Greece and Europe at large. We use a range of advocacy avenues, including by raising awareness among the public, through interventions to relevant law and policy makers, and by contribution to the production of knowledge and evidence.

Paramount to Fenix's approach and programming is combining efforts aimed at making an impact in the lives of individuals with creating long lasting, systemic change. We need an urgent shift in the foundations of the systems we work in to ensure the protection of the fundamental rights of people who seek asylum.

This shift more crucial than ever, as we continue to navigate a shift in political landscapes marked by a harshening attitudes and growing hostility towards individuals seeking asylum. This was reflected in changes in policies and practices that put up even more barriers and challenges for people with asylum claims. Alarming, amidst this shift there was a disconcerting lack of attention directed towards the grave violations of the rights of individuals seeking asylum.

To this end, we utilise different avenues of advocacy which, combined with our strategic efforts for individual cases, seek to create more just and effective asylum systems. Our goals with our advocacy work are four: 1) Increased awareness about rights violations among the general public, 2) centralising the voices and experiences of people who seek asylum in law

and policy making, 3) increased accountability for rights and procedural violations, and 4) laws, policies and practices that respect the rights of people seeking asylum are adopted.

In working towards these goals, we conduct several advocacy efforts:

- Conduct surveys, interviews and focus groups with people on the move to centralise their voices
- Using our social media and other communication platforms to raise awareness about rights violations
- Contributing to existing bodies of knowledge and evidence through reports based on our experience on the ground
- Directly putting issues on the agenda of relevant authorities through letters and policy notes
- Speaking with journalists, researchers, MEPs, (I)NGOs and others to help them address the situation in Greece

Believing in the power of collaboration, we worked closely with other stakeholders to leverage combined influence for a more significant impact. Our publications can be found on [our website](#).

STRATEGIC LEGAL REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY



We represented **46** clients from **12** nationalities, plus people in a situation of statelessness at every stage of the asylum procedure: first instance, appeal, subsequent application, domestic and international courts, and complaint mechanisms



We submitted **4** new annulment applications against second instance rejections due to procedural violations through the asylum procedure. Successful annulment applications are the main avenue to fight for systemic change through the courts



100% of interviewed clients expressed they experienced progress in their case since they were appointed a Fenix lawyer to represent them



We published **12** reports, policy briefs, blog posts, and statements, participated in **2** joint reports and sent **5** letters to authorities advocating for positive change at the local, national, and European levels



We spoke at **5** international conferences and hosted **11** visiting researchers, journalists, and organisations to amplify the situation for asylum seekers in Greece



90% of clients interviewed expressed increased sense of wellbeing after Fenix interventions.

CAPACITY BRIDGING



Rooted in a deep belief in ethical and rights based humanitarian work, we provide training on safeguarding and the asylum procedure to other actors to ensure other actors can better place their service in the wider context of refugee protection.

People seeking asylum access a variety of services during their journey to safety. Our holistic approach recognizes this – individuals are far more than just their legal cases. While the pursuit of safety and international protection is the core reason for these individuals, the services provided are often not centred around this. In fact, we have seen a lack of understanding of the asylum procedure among NGO actors, which may hinder their ability to fully address the challenges faced by the people they offer their services to. Moreover, it may lead to staff members accidentally contributing to the spreading of rumours and misinformation, by advising on a legal system they lack knowledge of.

This gets more urgent when actors who provide services not only address the direct needs but also produce documentation in the course of their work, such as medical, psychological or social reports, that can serve as supportive evidence to the person's asylum claim.

Therefore, through our capacity bridging programme, we aim to foster collaboration among actors, creating a network of support for asylum seekers throughout their procedure. This promotes a responsible, informed and rights based approach among all services that people seeking asylum may come into contact with.

The outcomes we are working towards with this project are: 1) Ensuring that service providers are fully aware of the refugee protection context in which they operate; 2) Encouraging the cautious provision of documentation that aligns with and supports the individual's asylum case; 3) Promoting the responsible and accountable delivery of services, including appropriate referrals; and 4) Addressing and dispelling the ever-changing rumours that asylum seekers encounter, which may negatively impact their decision-making and case outcomes.

Capacity Bridging training as part of this project include:

- Asylum Procedure on Lesbos
- Trauma-informed service provision
- Asylum on the ground of SOGIESC
- Safeguarding in the asylum-seeking context

Each training is tailored to the type of service provided by the participants. For actors providing medical and psychological support, the focus includes detailed guidance on the importance of appropriate documentation and identification of particular vulnerabilities. In contrast, training sessions for community centers emphasize responsible information provision. Based on our belief in reciprocity and exchange, we receive training from many of these organisations to in turn improve our practice in for example psychological first aid.

CAPACITY BRIDGING IMPACT



Capacity Bridging and Medical Evidence

One of the closest collaborations we have is with actors providing medical and mental health care and documentation. First, there is often a very direct correlation between a person's asylum claim and their well-being, on the one hand because previous experiences have created (mental) health challenges, on the other hand because the asylum procedure exacerbates existing or creates new challenges due to the stress, anxiety and living conditions.

Second, medical and mental health professionals are able to provide documentation that serves as excellent evidence that helps strengthen a person's claim, such as scar mapping, GBV certificates or mental health analyses. Before we started with our capacity bridging sessions for these actors, we saw that professionals typically provided very lengthy and detailed reports, often including (unnecessary) details about a person's flight story. As people's memory is often affected by their trauma, it often happens that certain details are remembered differently or in a different order at different times - one of the reasons interview preparation is so vital. Therefore, when submitted during the asylum interview these documents could be used against a person by the asylum service, saying they are not consistent and therefore not credible, leading to rejections of their asylum claim. Since we offer our training, professionals understand the importance to stick to the details about the (mental) health of the person, without going into detail about their story.



86%

OF ATTENDEES

feel better able to provide their service after receiving training on safeguarding, asylum procedure or SOGIESC



461

HUMANITARIAN
WORKERS TRAINED
IN 2024

"I feel like I can better relate to or understand what people go through here" - attendee to asylum procedure training

"Trying to grasp how we work as an organisation in parallel with Fenix would be good to explore more" - attendee from a medical organisation

”

For me the sessions with Fenix are a space where I could speak and where I would be heard. This was very important for me in this phase, as I did not feel heard or like anybody else cared for me out there.”

– client from Palestine

With a big thank you to our committed donors:



**CHOOSE
LOVE**



**TOGETHER
RISING**

do
Stiftung

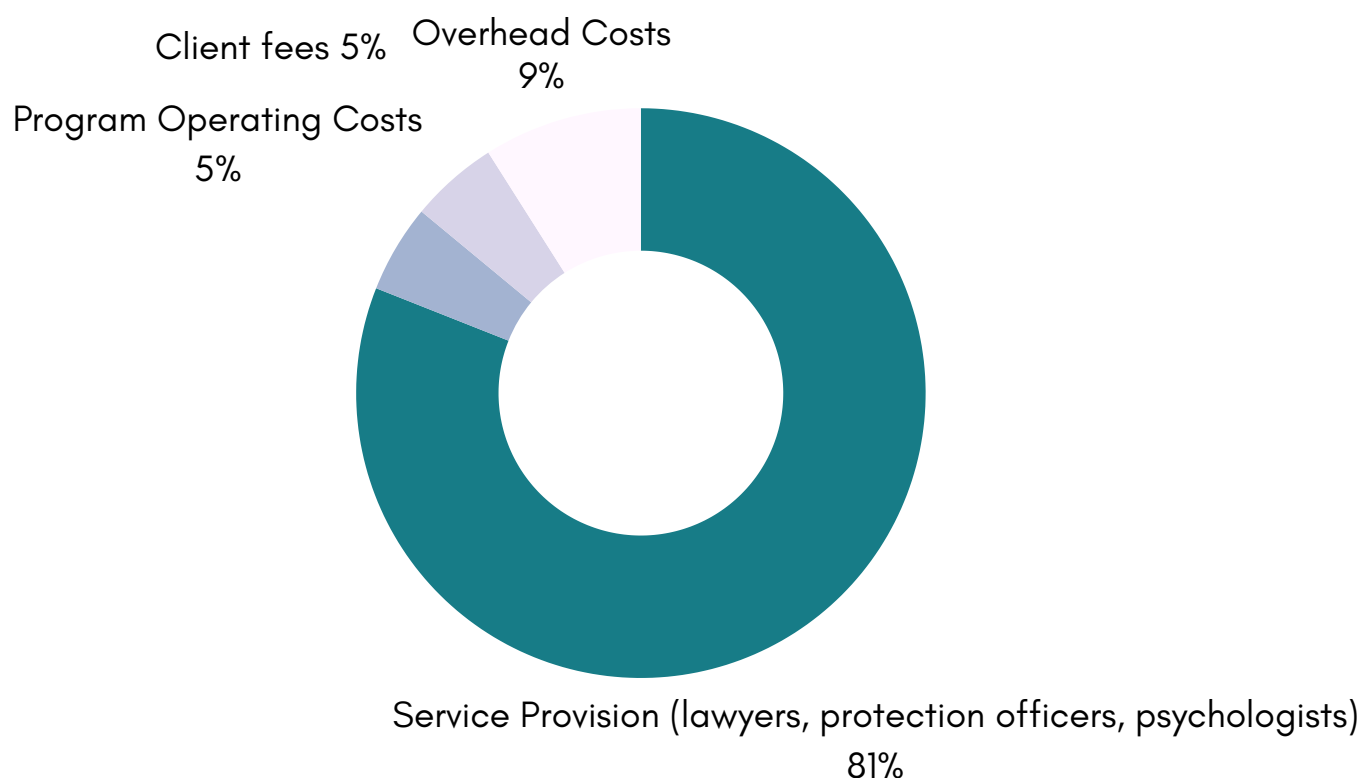


H A E L L A
stichting



And to everyone who supported our work either financially, by sharing their expertise, helping us advocate for change, or joining our team. To all the other actors who trusted us in our collaboration. And, most importantly, to our clients, who trusted our service and inspire us every day to continue working towards a world where everyone can live in safety and freedom.

FINANCES 2024





THIS IS PROPERTY OF FENIX
HUMANITARIAN LEGAL AID AND CANNOT BE
REPLICATED OR USED IN ANY WAY
WITHOUT EXPRESS WRITTEN
AUTHORIZATION OF FENIX. FOR
QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT:
MAAIKE@FENIXAID.ORG

