



**Refugee Support Aegean (RSA)  
Annual Report 2020**

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### Legal & Psychosocial Support

- 224 assisted asylum seekers and refugees
- 17 annulment applications before administrative courts
- 13 objections against detention before administrative courts
- 8 cases before the ECtHR
- 2 interventions in ECtHR cases
- 1,142 recipients of social assistance



### Research & Advocacy

- 8 analyses of Greek and EU legislation
- 5 legal notes on the Greek asylum system
- 5 reports on living conditions for refugees
- 3 submissions to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers
- 17 interventions in conferences, seminars and hearings



### Communications

- 36 interviews with domestic and international media
- 3,927 Twitter followers
- 393 citations of RSA material by courts, stakeholders and media



### Organisation

- 3 areas of activity in Greece: Chios, Lesbos, Athens
- 4 teams: Legal Support, Research & Advocacy, Communications, Finance & Administration

The year 2020 was marked by numerous adverse developments in the Greek asylum system and refugee protection: persistent continuation of the EU-Turkey deal as a policy of containment of refugees; legislative restrictions on the scope of international protection and the actors involved therein; extraordinary conditions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in Greece and the rest of the world. Throughout the year, we noted in particular:

1. Severe barriers to access to the territory through a **sharp increase in reports of unlawful and violent push backs** of refugees by the Greek authorities at land and sea borders, as well as from the mainland, to Turkey. Push backs continued despite **strong and systematic critique of the government** *inter alia* by international organisations, European Union (EU) institutions, human rights organisations and media.
2. **Suspension of the asylum procedure** by way of emergency decree for one month, entailing an unprecedented flagrant **violation** of international law by Greece, following the Turkish Government's announcement that it would not prevent transit through its borders to Greece at the end of February 2020.
3. **Entry into force of the International Protection Act (IPA)**, L 4636/2019, and its subsequent amendment by L 4686/2020, which *inter alia* introduced **further restrictions on procedural safeguards for asylum seekers** and imposed obstacles on their representations, i.e. derogations from the suspensive effect of appeals despite well-documented deficiencies in the provision of legal aid, stricter requirements for legal representation, narrower possibilities for exemption from border procedures, and a multidimensional **expansion of administrative detention**.
4. Further **deterioration of inhuman living conditions** in Reception and Identification Centres (RIC) on the Eastern Aegean islands, which reached over 38,000 residents compared to a capacity of 6,178 places at the **end of January**. The epitome of the State's failure to guarantee even minimum standards of dignified living for asylum seekers came with the destruction of the RIC of Moria, Lesbos in September 2020 and the ensuing treatment of nearly tens of thousands of fire victims left without shelter, health care and necessary assistance for several days, prior to being transferred to a new temporary facility in Kara Tepe (Mavrovouni) under extremely precarious and unsuitable reception conditions.
5. Impact of the **COVID-19 pandemic on reception conditions**, namely through the introduction and consistent prolongation of movement restrictions on RIC residents, quarantine of facilities across the territory, **suspension of operation of administrative authorities and courts**, as well as emergence of new means of conducting asylum procedures such as **remote interviews**, which raise serious fairness concerns.
6. **Speeding up of exits of recognised refugees** from the reception system through legislative reforms – IPA, L 4674/2020 – amid the pandemic and government announcements of evictions from reception facilities and ESTIA programme apartments. Following those initiatives, in the absence of an effective

integration policy, **thousands of people were left without accommodation and access to social rights** throughout the territory.

7. Doubling down on **restrictions on the operation of civil society** working in the area of international protection through a series of legislative provisions – L 4662/2020, JMD 3043/2020, L 4686/2020, JMD 10616/2020 – and political declarations, as well as a rise in racist violence incidents and **attacks** against refugees and aid workers.
8. Presentation of the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum** and accompanying package of legislative proposals by the European Commission, attempting an **codification and further entrenchment of the EU's failed operational approach** which has led to chronic mass containment of people in inhuman conditions at entry points, namely the Greek islands, as well as to a steady dismantling of the procedural safeguards and quality of the asylum procedure.

These circumstances had visible impact on the work of Refugee Support Aegean (RSA). They provided, however, opportunities, for deepening and expanding activities in all areas of activity and for strengthening our internal organisation.



The Legal Support Team provided free legal assistance to 224 beneficiaries in the course of 2020. A breakdown of beneficiaries whose asylum cases were supported by the team in asylum cases during 2020 is available below:

Area	Beneficiaries assisted in 2020
Lesvos	137
Chios	9
Samos	1
Kos	6
Rhodes	1
Symi	1
Mainland (Attica, Evros)	69
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>

A nationality breakdown of beneficiaries is available below:

Country of origin	Beneficiaries assisted in 2020
Afghanistan	101
Syria	66
Democratic Republic of Congo	15
Iran	8
Turkey	8
Iraq	7
Somalia	7
Togo	5
Palestine	2
Guinea	2
Angola	1
Cameroon	1
Sudan	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>

Support by the team involves legal assistance and representation before the competence administrative authorities (Asylum Service, Appeals Authority, Hellenic Police, Reception and Identification Service), independent bodies (Ombudsman), administrative courts, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), EU agencies (EASO, Frontex) and United Nations committees competent for human rights issues.

Throughout the year, the Legal Support Team submitted on behalf of RSA clients:

- 11 applications for annulment of Appeals Authority decisions before the Administrative Court of Athens;
- 6 applications for annulment of expulsion decisions before the Administrative Court of Mytilene;

- 13 objections against detention orders before the Administrative Courts of Athens, Mytilene and Rhodes;
- 8 applications before the ECtHR, including requests for interim measures under Rule 39 of the Rules of Court.

The activities of the Legal Support Team are set out in more detail by area below:

## Asylum procedure

### Access to the procedure

2020 was marked by a significant increase in testimonies and allegations of systematic practices of push backs and collective expulsions of refugees at the country's land and sea borders. Per established administrative practice, the competent authorities refrain from registering arrest and arrival of the persons concerned prior to their push back / removal to Turkey. In this context, the Legal Support Team undertook **interventions before the competent authorities** – Police Directorates, Asylum Service, Hellenic Coast Guard, Northern Aegean Prosecutor – to ensure that newly arrived refugees in Evros and Lesbos could have their claims registered. Particular attention was paid to the protection of Turkish nationals from unlawful push back to their country of origin. The team successfully secured **ECtHR involvement to prevent a push back** at the Evros land border. In the case of **M.K. v. Greece** App No 43654/20, concerning a refugee facing persecution on political grounds, the **Court granted interim measures** in October 2020 **to guarantee the asylum seeker's right to remain on Greek territory** pending the registration and processing of his asylum claim.

### Special procedural guarantees

Legal support and representation of vulnerable applicants on the islands became all the more pressing given the repeal of the general exemption of vulnerable persons from the border procedure under the IPA. In collaboration with and upon referral from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the Legal Support Team undertook **legal support and representation of asylum seekers with particular vulnerabilities such as victims of torture** in the asylum procedure, with a view to guaranteeing their access to a fair examination of their asylum application.

The organisation supported 45 persons in 2020 under the project. The cases relate to the treatment of victims of torture both on the admissibility of asylum claims of Syrian nationals, as well as on the merits of claims of other clients, originating from countries such as Togo and DRC. Work under the project is underpinned by **significant and multifaceted deficiencies in the Greek administration's compliance with legal standards in the conduct of asylum procedures with vulnerable people**. The following issues are worth highlighting:

- **Inability of victims of torture to access certification procedures** before public health institutions due to the complete absence of the necessary infrastructure and processes at public hospitals e.g. "Vostanio" General Hospital of Mytilene, "Skylitsio" General Hospital of Chios, "Evangelismos" General Hospital of Athens;
- **Deficiencies and gaps in the vulnerability identification process** managed by the Reception and Identification Service (RIS), even in the case of asylum seekers for whom the ECtHR has granted interim measures e.g. **M.A. v. Greece** App No 18179/20;
- **Restrictive interpretation and problematic application of IPA provisions on "special procedural guarantees"** by the Asylum Service and the case law of

Appeals Committees, bearing serious repercussions on the assessment of asylum seekers' credibility and of the merits of their claim.

### Judicial protection

The Legal Support Team continues to place emphasis on legal support and representation to assist persons facing readmission to Turkey under the EU-Turkey deal in **exercising remedies** before administrative courts and the ECtHR, following the rejection of their asylum applications at first and second instance.

- RSA lawyers submitted 10 applications for annulment of Appeals Authority decisions, coupled with requests for suspensive effect to allow applicants to remain pending the outcome of the remedy, before the Administrative Court of Athens, the competent court for judicial review of international protection decisions under the IPA. In two cases in September and October 2020, **the Administrative Court of Athens granted suspensive effect** against the contested decisions, pending the outcome of judicial review, to prevent a **risk of difficultly repairable harm, bearing in mind the mental state of the applicants**. This guaranteed the individuals' right to remain in the country until the completion of judicial proceedings.
- In the case of **M.A. v. Greece** App No 5474/20, the ECtHR granted interim measures in January 2020 to prevent the readmission of a family with minor children from Chios to Turkey, although the measures were not prolonged upon request.

The **institutional structure of remedies in asylum legislation** and the **composition of Appeals Committees** remain a judicial protection priority for RSA, insofar as they raise serious concerns about compliance with the right to a fair trial, not least in light of the reform of rules on competence for judicial review.

In October 2020, **the Council of State accepted a referral for a pilot judgment** in three applications for annulment supported by RSA, on public interest grounds relating to the **constitutionality of adjudication by the Administrative Court of decisions taken by Appeals Committees, largely composed by appeal-level judges**. The launch of the pilot judgment procedure brought about a suspension of judicial review in all pending annulment applications until the Council of State delivers its ruling. The cases are expected to be heard in February 2021.

### Reception conditions

Throughout 2020, the Legal Support Team took action to enable clients' protection from inhuman and deteriorating living conditions in the RIC of the Eastern Aegean islands. More specifically, the team triggered domestic procedures and ECtHR interim measures proceedings in relation to **precarious and unsuitable reception conditions in RIC and the consistent dismantling of alternative forms of reception on the island of Lesbos**:

- In the case of **E.I. v. Greece** App No 16080/20, RSA **secured** interim measures from the Court in April 2020 for a group of vulnerable clients residing in Moria, regardless of legal status, in order to **guarantee their accommodation and health care in line with human rights**. In addition, the Court granted interim measures in **M.A. v. Greece** App No 18179/20 in May 2020 for an asylum-seeking victim of torture residing in Moria. The case, communicated on 4 January 2021, will deal *inter alia* with non-implementation of interim measures.

- Following the complete destruction of the RIC of Moria in September 2020, more than 7,000 people were left homeless on Lesbos without access to the necessary assistance to cater for their immediate subsistence needs. The Legal Support Team **triggered the Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council** through a submission to the Special Rapporteurs for housing, the right to food, the right to potable water and sanitation, the right to health and to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), on behalf of eight asylum seekers formerly residing in Moria. The applicants denounced their exposure to inhuman and degrading treatment and to arbitrary deprivation and restriction of their liberty.

The Moria fire victims were later transferred to a newly established temporary facility in Kara Tepe under particularly precarious conditions. In the case of **S.A. and O.A. v. Greece** App No 40124/20, concerning two vulnerable asylum seekers placed in the facility despite the lifting of their geographical restriction on Lesbos, RSA **secured interim measures from the ECtHR to guarantee their departure from the island** and their transfer to suitable reception conditions on the mainland.

### Support to mothers with new-born children

Under a project launched in August 2020 through private funding from Stiftung PRO ASYL / Hans Maier Family, RSA has provided support to mothers with new-born children on Lesbos. Activities under the project include distribution of mother and baby kits to new-borns and mothers at the “Vostanio” General Hospital of Mytilene, as well as provision of free legal assistance and representation by two lawyers of the Legal Support Team.

In this context, in light of the government's decision to evacuate the PIKPA reception facilities on Lesbos without notifying the requisite administrative decisions to the residents, the Legal Support Team submitted a report to the Ombudsman and lodged an interim measures request before the ECtHR in **Abdule v. Greece** App No 45427/20, to prevent the departure of a single-parent family from adequate conditions in PIKPA. Despite timely intervention from the Ombudsman and the setting of a deadline by the Court for the parties to provide information on the case, the authorities evacuated the centre on 30 October before the expiry of the deadline set by the Court in a move of **unprecedented contempt for court proceedings**. As a result, the request for interim measures was rendered without object.

### Immigration detention

The work of the Legal Support Team in the area of protection of refugees and migrants from arbitrary deprivation of liberty mainly focused on the adjudication of the following issues before administrative courts and the ECtHR:

- Unlawful automatic detention of newly arrived asylum seekers during the period of effect of the emergency decree suspending the asylum procedure in March 2020, without any assessment of risks of *refoulement* and despite the expression of intention to lodge an application for international protection;
- Unlawful pre-deportation detention due to a lack of prospects of removal, following the indefinite suspension of readmissions under the EU-Turkey deal since March 2020;
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the conditions and legality of detention, bearing in mind the exacerbated health risks in detention centres.

In a [note](#) published in October 2020, as well as an April 2020 [note](#) on the impact of the suspension of the asylum procedure on detention, RSA summarised the **case law of administrative courts** on detention. Decisions reveal **serious gaps in the effectiveness of judicial review of detention** of asylum seekers in the objections procedure, as courts have omitted the assessment of removal prospects and detention conditions, and have made a particularly problematic reading of the legal status of the emergency decree and its effect over the country's fundamental duties to guarantee access to international protection.

## Dublin Regulation

In the course of 2020, RSA supported cases of reunification of asylum seekers with family members in other European countries pursuant to the Dublin Regulation. Of those, 84 persons had family reunification procedures in Switzerland and 19 in Germany. The main observations drawn by RSA from the Dublin procedure throughout the year concern the following:

- Significant delays in the processing of “take charge” requests, particularly on the mainland, owed to obstacles to access to the asylum procedure. These difficulties have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic e.g. through cancellation of registration appointment, namely in the Regional Asylum Office of Piraeus;
- Repercussions of incorrect registration of asylum seekers' personal details – such as minority – on the submission of “take charge” requests for reunification with relatives;
- Lack of reception conditions and prolonged detention of asylum seekers pending family reunification procedures, even after the acceptance of “take charge” requests by the receiving Member State;
- Delays in the transfer of asylum seekers from the islands to the mainland and risk of expiry of the six-month transfer deadline under the Regulation.

## Recognised refugees

Rapid developments in legislation and practice regarding the exit of recognised refugees from the reception system, in conjunction with the absence of an effective integration programme and with chronic, systematic barriers and discrimination against refugees vis-à-vis access to basic social rights, have exposed thousands of people to precarious conditions of homelessness in the country, namely in Athens.

During the summer, the Legal Support Team provided support to 46 recognised refugees who were transferred from Lesbos to Athens and ended up homeless in Victoria Square, to submit **complaints** before the General Secretariat of Reception and Asylum against their eviction from reception facilities and **applications for the necessary housing measures to terminate their homelessness until their inclusion in the HELIOS programme** run by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Furthermore, the Legal Support Team continued to support litigation at European level concerning returns of recognised refugees from other countries to Greece through legal intervention:

- In June 2020, RSA and Foundation PRO ASYL submitted a [third party intervention](#) to the ECtHR in the case of **Kurdistan Darwesh v. Greece and the Netherlands**

App No 52334/19, where the Court will assess Article 3 ECHR compliance in the return of a family of recognised refugees to Greece, with a focus on access to housing, social welfare and health care. The intervention of RSA and Foundation PRO ASYL provides up-to-date information on refugees' access to the necessary documentation (AFM, AMKA) and the aforementioned social rights in 2020.

- Upon request from legal representatives, the Legal Support Team submitted **3 expert opinions** in domestic proceedings in Germany and Switzerland relating to the living conditions of beneficiaries of international protection in Greece.

## Shipwrecks

The year 2020 ended with two shipwrecks near Lesbos, as the lack of safe alternatives drives refugees to dangerous journeys. The RSA team supported family members of victims in the identification process.

The Legal Support Team also lodged an application before the ECtHR in a case relating to omissions on the part of the Hellenic Coast Guard to perform search and rescue, resulting in the **death of 16 people in a shipwreck in Agathonisi in March 2018**. The appeal against the refusal of the Prosecutor of the Naval Court of Piraeus to press charges for manslaughter was rejected by the Prosecutor of the Review Court in December 2019, on the ground of insufficient indications.

The team also filed a compensation claim against the Greek State before the Administrative Court of Rhodes for tortious liability in the **death of a refugee by Hellenic Coast Guard fire in Symi** in August 2015. The Council of the Naval Court of Piraeus issued an acquittal in October 2017.



### Interpretation and support to the health system

In the course of 2020, RSA provided **Farsi interpretation services** at the “Vostanio” General Hospital of Mytilene, covering a total of **977 cases**. Despite the organisation’s contribution, interpretation needs remain very high at “Vostanio”.

In April 2020, through the involvement of RSA and Foundation PRO ASYL, a **grant of medical equipment** worth 200,000 € by the Guido Fluri Foundation and the Swiss Protestant Church was secured for “Vostanio” Hospital. Funding was further increased during the critical months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Registration of child births

RSA lawyers provided exclusive support in **165 cases of new-born babies and their families at the Registry of Chios**, in order to complete their **registration and naming** and to overcome barriers in the issuance of documents such as residence permits and travel documents. Due to the policy of containment of even vulnerable people on the island, the number of births in 2020 was double the number reported the previous year. The overwhelming majority of families were forced to remain in extremely adverse conditions in the RIC of VIAL on Chios.

### Humanitarian assistance to Moria fire victims

The Moria fire and complete destruction of the RIC at the beginning of September left over 7,000 refugees homeless and confined in a neighbouring area. Serious omissions on the part of the Greek State in providing the necessary humanitarian assistance to the fire victims compounded their precarious situation. For at least one week, refugees were forced to sleep wherever they could find space, in cardboard boxes, playgrounds and cemeteries, without access to running water, toilets, with restricted access to food and water, and without medical care.

In these urgent circumstances, RSA responded rapidly by maintaining regular contact with clients and by covering their basic needs. Parallel to legal action for the provision of reception conditions, the organisation took measures to ensure provision of food and water, bed linen and sanitary items on account of the pandemic, immediate coverage of medical needs through referrals to health care professionals and coverage of needs in medicines to persons with chronic conditions, as well as through the provision of power banks to ensure that communication with relatives could continue.



In 2020, RSA continued to document the implementation of the Greek asylum system, living conditions of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection on the islands and the mainland, as well as developments at EU level. RSA issued the following publications, usually in two languages (Greek and English):

- 8 comments papers on legislative proposals and initiatives at national and EU level
- 5 legal notes on issues related to the Greek asylum system
- 5 reports on the living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees in different parts of the country
- 3 submissions to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in the framework of supervision of the execution of ECtHR judgments
- 2 interventions in pending cases before the ECtHR

Format	Title of publication [link]	Date
Report	Moria nightmare [GR, EN]	23 Jan 2020
Report	"In this place, we have to help ourselves" – Malakasa camp [GR, EN]	21 Apr 2020
Comments	Comments on the Reform of the International Protection Act [GR, EN]	23 Apr 2020
Legal Note	Rights denied in Greek asylum procedure suspension [GR, EN]	01 May 2020
Comments	Risk of repression: New rules on civil society supporting refugees and migrants in Greece [EN]	19 May 2020
Intervention	Third party intervention in <i>Kurdestan Darwesh v. Greece and the Netherlands</i> [EN]	04 Jun 2020
Policy Note	Στατιστικά στοιχεία για μία πληρέστερη εικόνα του ασύλου [GR]	22 Jun 2020
Submission	Submission to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in <i>M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece and Rahimi v. Greece</i> [EN]	28 Jul 2020
Submission	Submission to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in <i>Sakir v. Greece</i> [EN]	31 Jul 2020
Report	Recognised but unprotected: The situation of refugees in Victoria Square [EN]	03 Aug 2020
Comments	Feedback on the European Commission roadmap "Pact on Migration and Asylum" [EN]	13 Aug 2020
Comments	Repression continued: Greece further restricts civil society supporting refugees and migrants [EN]	18 Sep 2020
Submission	Submission to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in <i>S.D. v. Greece</i> [EN]	20 Oct 2020
Legal Note	Αντιρρήσεις κατά κράτησης: Παρατηρήσεις επί της νομολογίας [GR]	21 Oct 2020
Comments	Comments on the amended proposal for an Asylum Procedures Regulation [GR, EN]	26 Oct 2020
Comments	Comments on the proposal for an Asylum and Migration Management Regulation [GR, EN]	26 Oct 2020
Comments	Comments on the proposal for a Screening Regulation [GR, EN]	26 Oct 2020
Comments	Comments on the proposal for a Regulation addressing crisis and <i>force majeure</i> in migration and asylum [GR, EN]	26 Oct 2020
Intervention	Third party intervention in <i>H.T. v. Greece and Germany</i> [EN]	30 Oct 2020

Legal Note	Αναγκαία η επανεξέταση της προβληματικής έννοιας της «ασφαλούς χώρας καταγωγής» [GR]	07 Nov 2020
Report	Moria 2.0: Trapped refugees at the mercy of winter [GR, EN]	01 Dec 2020
Legal Note	The conduct of (remote) asylum interview on Lesbos [EN]	08 Dec 2020
Report	New Malakasa: Inhuman subsistence, nine months on [GR, EN]	17 Dec 2020

Furthermore, RSA advocated its positions through contact with institutions such as the European Parliament, as well as **presentations and interventions** by RSA staff in at least 17 discussions, conferences and seminars organised in 2020 at domestic and European level:

Institution	Title	Date
Hertie School	Seminar "Human rights in the time of coronavirus"	02 Jun 2020
Amnesty International	Seminar "Δικαιώματα σε καραντίνα: μια συζήτηση για τους πρόσφυγες"	09 Jun 2020
Racist Violence Recording Network	Annual Report launch	16 Jun 2020
National Commission for Human Rights	Hearing on issues relating to refugees and migrants	18 Jun 2020
Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung	Seminar "Routes of solidarity"	22 Jun 2020
Evangelische Akademie zu Berlin	20 <sup>th</sup> Berlin Conference on Refugee Rights	23 Jun 2020
National Integration and Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM)	Seminar "The pandemic and refugees"	25 Jun 2020
European Parliament	LIBE Committee hearing on fundamental rights at the Greek-Turkish borders	06 Jul 2020
European Parliament	Seminar "Containment and Deterrence: EU Asylum Policies in Greece and Implications for the Upcoming Pact"	14 Jul 2020
Odysseus Network	Summer School, Panel "Refoulement at EU borders: The cases of Hungary, Croatia and Greece"	04 Sep 2020
Hertie School	Webinar "Spotlight on hotspots and the new EU Migration Pact"	23 Sep 2020
European Parliament	Sophie in't Veld Masterclass on asylum and migration	05 Oct 2020
Academy of European Law (ERA)	Annual Conference on European Asylum Law	16 Oct 2020
European Parliament	Seminar "Migration Pact – A better future for migration and asylum in the EU?"	28 Oct 2020
Heinrich Böll Stiftung	Conference "Le Pacte européen sur la migration et l'asile en question"	10 Nov 2020
National Commission for Human Rights	Working Group on a mechanism for recording of push back allegations	30 Nov 2020
European Parliament	Seminar "The Migration and Asylum Pact: Challenging the European Commission's narrative"	02 Dec 2020

It is worth noting that RSA participated in the Civil Liberties (LIBE) Committee of the European Parliament [hearing](#) as the **sole civil society representative**, along with the Minister of Citizen Protection, the Minister of Migration and Asylum, the Alternate

Minister of Migration and Asylum, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs and the Executive Director of Frontex.

### Contribution to legislative work

RSA continued to contribute to the improvement of legislative work with the aim of preventing the enactment of harmful reforms and of guaranteeing the compatibility of Greek legislation with constitutional principles and fundamental rights. In the context of the **Bill amending the International Protection Act** tabled in April 2020 by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, the Research & Advocacy Team, in collaboration with the Legal Support Team, contributed to the legislative process through **extensive legal analysis and intervention in public consultation**, as regards the following main points:

- Deletion of the suggested amendment to the definition of “subsequent application”;
- Deletion of the suggested restriction on free legal assistance only to cases deemed to have a tangible prospect of success;
- Deletion of proposed additional grounds for omitting the personal interview;
- Amendment of the provision on implicit withdrawal of asylum applications in line with EU legislation.

In addition, the Research & Advocacy Team, in collaboration with the Legal Support Team, led on interventions before the competent authorities (General Secretariat for Migration Policy, Asylum Service) for a **review and improvement of regulatory acts** on the asylum procedure. For example, RSA submitted a [request](#) for revision of the national list of “safe countries of origin”, in particular as regards Togo.

Following the presentation of the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum** by the European Commission in September 2020, RSA [analysed](#) the serious legal and practical implications of the legislative package on the Greek asylum system and put forward recommendations to prevent them. Based on the position developed by the organisation, the Research & Advocacy Team developed a number of advocacy activities, including:

- Regular contact with rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs at the European Parliament e.g. Tineke Strik, Damian Boeselager, Jan-Christoph Oetjen, Sophie in’t Veld, Birgit Sippel;
- Engagement with the inter-ministerial negotiating team of the Greek government at the Council of the European Union;
- Coordination of joint research and advocacy action by civil society organisations in Greece in the framework of an informal Working Group on Asylum Procedures, under the auspices of the Advocacy Working Group.

The team was also approached by the **Council of Bars and Law Societies in Europe (CCBE)** in November 2020 to take part in the development of their comments on the legislative package, scheduled to be published in 2021.

### Contribution to parliamentary activities and monitoring bodies

RSA triggered and contributed to the work of domestic and international monitoring bodies through its research and advocacy activities to promote Greece's compliance with international and EU law in 2020. Actions were carried out through **holistic engagement with monitoring institutions and processes, coupled with research, communications and legal work**.

Research and advocacy activities relating to the legislative framework on registration of non-governmental organisations in the field of international protection are an illustrative example of the organisation's contribution to such processes:

- RSA published an [analysis](#) of the legal implications of JMD 3043/2020 and an [analysis](#) of JMD 10616/2020 which were explicitly relied upon *inter alia* by the **Council of Europe** Expert Council on NGO Law opinion, the **European Commission Rule of Law Report** and the **European Parliament study** on protecting civil society in the EU;
- Engagement with MEPs led to a LIBE Committee **request for a legal assessment** of the legislation by the European Commission and to [written questions to the Commission on the compatibility of the provisions with EU law](#). In its [reply](#), the Commission mentions its intention to engage with the Greek authorities on the issue and to assess the implementation of the provisions;
- RSA raised media awareness on the measures via **interviews with international outlets** such as [AFP](#), [EU Observer](#), [ETC](#);
- RSA submitted a **report to the Ombudsman** together with the Greek Council for Refugees and HIAS Greece.

### [Access to accurate information on asylum](#)

Transparency and accuracy of official asylum data are indispensable to an understanding of the current conditions and needs in the country. Since its re-establishment in early 2020, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum regularly presents targeted statistics on the management of the asylum system through information notes, interviews with national and international media and presentations in Parliament. At the same time, however, the Ministry has discontinued the public dissemination of statistics by the Asylum Service, while authorities continue not to comply with legal obligations to release detailed data.

Against that backdrop, RSA put particular emphasis on **dissemination, analysis and interpretation of statistics** with a view to identifying information gaps and **accurately depicting the state of the Greek asylum system**. Throughout the year, these objectives were promoted through regular publication of articles and notes:

- In a [policy note](#) on asylum statistics, RSA highlighted the need for the Ministry of Migration and Asylum's statistical practice to be brought in line with the amendment of Regulation 862/2007, adopted in 2020;
- In an [article](#) dated 4 June, RSA published exclusive statistical data on readmissions of recognised refugees from other EU countries, provided by the Hellenic Police Directorate;
- In a series of articles published on [14 July](#), [21 August](#), [3 September](#) and [9 December](#), RSA analysed asylum recognition rates at first and second instance and addressed disparities between Ministry and Eurostat data. Our observations and recommendations were echoed by national [media](#).
- In an article dated [13 November](#), RSA collected and analysed Hellenic Police Directorate statistics on returns from Greece, and contrasted those to the data presented by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.

## Contact with media and social media

### Media interviews

RSA strengthened its media work in 2020 through an **increase in both interviews and spokespersons on refugee rights**.

Throughout the year, different staff members gave at least 36 interviews with national (e.g. ERT, Efimerida ton Syntakton, Sto Nisi) and international media (e.g. The Guardian, AFP, EU Observer, Washington Post, Deutsche Welle, Libération, Al Jazeera, ORF). Indicative examples are set out below:

Member	Team	Outlet [link]	Date
Natassa Strachini	Legal Support	Washington Post [EN]	16 Sep 2020
Marianna Tzeferakou	Legal Support	Balkan Insight [EN]	22 Jun 2020
Asterios Kanavos	Legal Support	Al Jazeera [EN]	18 Sep 2020
		ERT [GR]	30 Oct 2020
		Internazionale [IT]	16 Sep 2020
Elpida Koukoula	Legal Support	SWR [DE]	01 Jul 2020
Eleni Spathana	Legal Support	ECRE [EN]	06 Nov 2020
Efi Latsoudi	Legal Support	Avgi [GR]	24 Sep 2020
		Libération [FR]	09 Sep 2020
		Tageszeitung [DE]	15 Dec 2020
Naiem Mohammadi	Legal Support	ORF [DE]	13 Dec 2020
		Popaganda [GR]	15 Dec 2020
Minos Mouzourakis	Research & Advocacy	The Guardian [EN]	27 Sep 2020
		AFP [EN]	20 Jun 2020
		EU Observer [EN]	03 Jun 2020
		Efsyn [GR]	05 May 2020
Salinia Stroux	Research & Advocacy	Berliner Zeitung [DE]	07 Oct 2020

### Social media presence

RSA maintains a strong social media presence, particularly with a steadily increasing following of its [account](#) on **Twitter**. The total number of followers of the RSA account **rose from 2,184 at the end of 2019 to 3,927 at the end of 2020 (80% increase)**, thereby positioning the organisation as a primary reliable source of information on asylum in Greece.

Through the regular engagement of the Communications Team on Twitter, RSA actively contributed to documenting developments on the Eastern Aegean islands, in particular on Lesbos following the destruction of Moria, and to effectively disseminating information to a broader international audience.



RSA @rspaegean · Oct 8

Tents in the new camp #Moria2 are filled with soil and water from the current rains in #Lesvos. These are the places where people are forced to sleep one month after the destruction of Moria. #Refugeesgr are desperate and it is doubtful if there is any plan for #winterization



0:21 46.8K views 11 741 418



RSA @rspaegean · Oct 13

The new camp in #Lesvos today. More than 7700 #refugeesgr have to live in this place.#Moria2 #opentheislands



5 421 254

RSA Twitter posts in 2020 gathered three-digit retweets and likes.

In the course of 2020, RSA also opened a **Facebook account**, currently at 664 followers.

### Information and documentation of testimonies

Throughout 2020, RSA outputs were published and disseminated via its website, available in [Greek](#) and [English](#). In addition to the 21 publications mentioned above, the Communications Team regularly published news items with primary information and testimonies, photos and audio-visual material on issues such as the aftermath of the destruction of Moria (covered in posts on [11 September](#), [11 September](#), [17 September](#), [17 October](#)) and living conditions on the remaining Eastern Aegean islands during the [pandemic](#).

Moreover, the team collated the main [reports of push backs](#) in the Aegean Sea since March 2020, as well as [responses and official positions](#) taken by the Greek government and international bodies, in two timelines published at the end of the year.

### Citations of RSA material

RSA outputs continued to contribute to the work of various actors such as jurisdictions in other countries, EU institutions, international organisations, civil society, researchers and media.

During 2020, RSA recorded at least 393 citations of its material, of which:

- 177 in case law of foreign jurisdictions, namely Germany, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands;
- 62 in reports and documents of authorities, researchers and organisations. Throughout the year, RSA material was expressly cited *inter alia* by EU institutions (European Commission, European Parliament), the Council of Europe, national authorities such as the German Bundestag and the Italian Guarantor of the Rights of Detained Persons (*Garanzie nazionale per i diritti delle persone detenute*);
- 154 in media outlets.



RSA counts **14 staff members**, including **8 lawyers**, active on **Chios, Lesvos** and **Athens**. The [organisational structure](#) of the organisation, available on its website, comprises of the following teams: Legal Support, Research & Advocacy, Communications, Finance & Administration.

### Premises

Since January 2020, RSA operates a branch office in **Athens**, in addition to its **Chios** headquarters.

### NGO Registry registration and certification

In keeping with national legislation requirements – JMD 3043/2020, as replaced by JMD 10616/2020 – RSA filed an application to register with the NGO Registry of the Special Secretariat for Stakeholder Coordination at the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. The outcome of the application is pending.

In the same vein, RSA developed a Quality Assurance System covering its legal support, research and advocacy activities, in line with the ISO 9001:2015 model. RSA was awarded **ISO 9001:2015 quality assurance system certification** by EQA on 16 November 2020.

### Cooperation with the PRO ASYL Foundation



RSA continues its collaboration with the **PRO ASYL Foundation** for the fourth consecutive year. PRO ASYL, a leading human rights organisation in Germany, has RSA as its exclusive partner in Greece, and has undertaken joint actions in 2020 at national (e.g. submission on Greece to the Council of Europe) and international level (e.g. joint position on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum).

### Synergies and networks

In 2020, RSA implemented a project with **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)** on Lesvos, under which it received referral of particularly vulnerable patients for free legal assistance on all levels of the asylum procedure, deportation proceedings, reception conditions and detention.

In 2020, RSA continued its cooperation with the **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** on registration of deaths at the border, through a fact-finding mission on Rhodes.

RSA is an active member of the **Racist Violence Recording Network** and systematically documents racially motivated violence on the islands of Lesvos and Chios. RSA submitted 10 incident reports in 2020.

Finally, RSA participates in regular meetings of the **Legal Aid Working Groups** organised by UNHCR on Lesvos, Chios and Athens, as well as in meetings of the **Advocacy Working Group** of civil society organisations in Athens.



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