

Testimony - Volunteering in Samos, Greece
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Hello everyone, I'm Eirini, I'm Greek and over the last 6 months I have been working as a legal caseworker with I Have Rights on Samos as a part of a civic service for Humacoop-France and I Have Rights.

As I grew up in one of the first reception countries in Europe for people on the move, I came to witness at a very early stage how unfair and inhuman the European policies are and thereafter how they create impediments for people fleeing from their home countries seeking protection and safety. Witnessing these injustices drove me to pursue my studies in the field of Migration, Asylum and Human Rights and subsequently and engage actively in the field with the aim to support and empower migrants and refugees.

Since the very beginning of my working experience in the field, I confronted the great lack of access to legal information about the asylum procedure faced by the asylum seekers and the severe violations of their human rights. As the 100% European founded CCAC (Closed Controlled Access Center) is located in a distant location, it is difficult for people to access the city center to receive further support and meet their basic daily needs. Furthermore, the living conditions in the CCAC can only be characterized as inhuman and degrading as there is a lack of access to sufficient medical care, running water (restricted to 2-3 hours per day), hygienic products and there is an outbreak of scabies and bedbugs among others.

In this context is where the work of my team came in to try to fight against these injustices and provide people on the move with legal information so they can make informed decisions. Given that the interview with the asylum service is one of the most important steps in the asylum procedure, we provided individual counseling to inform people of their rights and prepare them for their asylum interview. To make sure that more people can be informed we also provided legal support through the team hotline and together with other NGOs we organized legal workshops close to the CCAC to ensure and establish approachable channels of communication and information. Lastly, with the contribution of our team lawyer we assisted with appeals, family reunification, subsequent application and representation of a lawyer in the interview with the asylum service.

Having completed my 6 months of volunteering with I Have Rights, it became more evident to me how the right to know your rights is undermined in the challenging and inhuman environment of the CCAC and other Aegean islands as well as how essential and central for people on the move it is to have free access to information to empower themselves and make their own decisions. Nevertheless, as the long-established European policies along with new stricter and deadlier ones come to fight and undermine the right to asylum, it grows clearer that there is a need to continue to fight against these policies and defend in solidarity the right to asylum, safety and dignified living conditions.