

European Lawyers In Lesvos Annual Report 2019

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Foreword

A message from our Managing Director

This has been a very successful year for European Lawyers in Lesvos (ELIL), despite the increasingly challenging context.

Our team has expanded, the range of services we provide has grown and the number of asylum seekers we have been able to assist has increased. We formed important new partnerships with stakeholders across Europe and strengthened existing collaborations, whilst also continuing to improve the quality of the legal assistance we provide.

Our relationship with Bar Associations and Law Societies across Europe remains crucial. We were very grateful to receive support from 23 Bar Associations and Law Societies in 2019 and, in particular, were delighted that the Conseil National des Barreaux (CNB) joined as one of ELIL's shareholders.

Volunteers remained at the heart of our organisation and we welcomed 55 volunteers over the course of the year. Thanks to the incredible efforts of these volunteers and our staff, ELIL was honoured to receive three international awards, from PILnet, JUVE and Pax Christi.

However, the operational context on Lesvos has become increasingly challenging. The number of asylum seekers in Moria camp has increased significantly, from around 7,000 in July to over 21,000 by the end of the year. At the same time, the number of lawyers on the island decreased, meaning that more and more asylum seekers were unable to receive legal assistance. The need for legal assistance on Lesvos is therefore greater than ever.

The support we received from Bar Associations and Law Societies, partners and volunteers over the course of 2019 was critical in enabling us to continue our work to defend human rights, uphold the rule of law and provide asylum seekers with meaningful access to legal assistance.

Philip Worthington
Managing Director
European Lawyers in Lesvos

Arrivals on main Aegean islands Jan-Dec 2019

	SAMOS	CHIOS	LESVOS	TOTAL
2018	8,544	3,828	15,034	27,406
2019	10,705 ↑	8,073 ↑	27,049 ↑	45,827 ↑

UNHCR Data (2018, 2019)
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Introduction

Over the course of 2019, 50% more asylum seekers arrived on Lesbos than in the previous year.

By the end of the year, there were more people in Moria camp than at any previous time, including at the height of arrivals to Lesbos in late 2015/early 2016.

With over 22,000 people stranded on the island and only a handful of NGO lawyers to support them, the need for free legal assistance in 2019 was greater than ever.

Operational highlights

- Targeted outreach and legal support to specific groups – unaccompanied women and minors – that face obstacles to accessing legal assistance.
- First successful objections lodged on behalf of a minor in detention.

- Production, with Oxfam and the Greek Council for Refugees, of an information leaflet, 13,000 copies of which were distributed in 10 languages.
- New collaboration with a legal tech company (BRYTER) to improve the provision of legal assistance to asylum seekers on Lesbos.
- Expansion of ELIL staff from 6 to 14 permanent employees.
- Receipt of the PILnet, JUVE and Pax Christi International awards.
- Five new partnerships and a collaboration with six major international law firms.
- Support from 23 Bar Associations and Law Societies, with the Conseil National des Barreaux joining as a shareholder.



Identity and mission

Who we are

European Lawyers in Lesvos (“ELIL”) is a charity registered in Germany and Greece.

It was founded by the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) and the German Bar Association (DAV) in 2016, and is now also supported by the French Bar Association (CNB). Our team of Greek asylum lawyers and volunteer European asylum lawyers provides free, independent legal assistance to asylum seekers on Lesvos.

ELIL’s Supervisory Board is chaired by Professor Vassilios Skouris, who is an eminent Greek judge and former President of the European Court of Justice. Former Presidents of the CCBE and DAV are also members of ELIL’s Supervisory Board.

ELIL was inspired by belief in the fundamental importance of upholding the rule of law, defending human rights and ensuring meaningful access to legal assistance. We believe that every asylum seeker should be able to receive free, high quality legal assistance, from an independent lawyer experi-

enced in asylum law, before their asylum interview.

We are the largest provider of legal assistance to asylum seekers on Lesvos. So far, 214 European lawyers from 18 countries have volunteered with us and – alongside our team of full-time, permanent Greek asylum lawyers – have provided free legal assistance to over 10,000 people.

Asylum seekers on Lesvos go through a complex and ever-changing asylum process, which is difficult to navigate. Despite this, there is no state-provided legal aid available for asylum seekers before their asylum interview (which determines whether or not they will be granted asylum) and so most asylum seekers attend this critical one-time interview without having spoken to a lawyer. The only way an asylum seeker can receive legal assistance in relation to their asylum interview is through one of the very few NGOs on the island. Without access to legal assistance, asylum seekers often do not know their rights and obligations or understand the process and the criteria applied

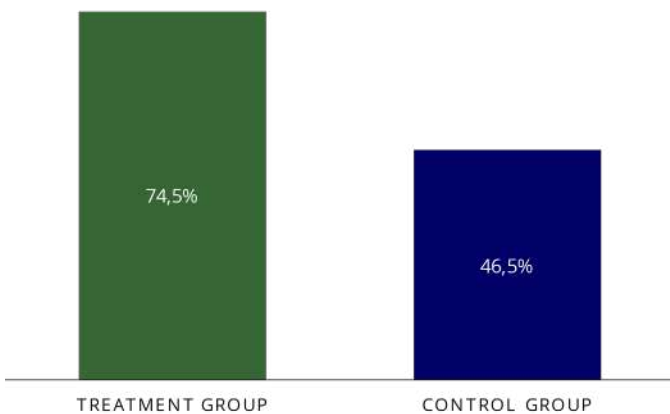
to assess their application, and are therefore significantly disadvantaged when they attend their asylum interview. This can also result in significant unnecessary delays to their procedures. The absence of legal information and legal assistance undermines the rule of law and puts human rights and physical and mental wellbeing at risk.

Through our work, we help uphold the rule of law, defend human rights and ensure the asylum procedure is fair, efficient and robust. We provide legal information and legal assistance to asylum seekers, in order to help them understand the asylum process and criteria, understand their rights and be fully prepared for their interview. By doing this, we help asylum seekers to go through the asylum process quickly and efficiently and ensure they are able to present their application in a way that fully reflects their need for asylum.

The difference we make

With proper understanding of how the asylum process works, asylum seekers are empowered to make a stronger case and have their rights upheld. Of those we have assisted who have notified us of the outcome of their asylum application, 74.5% have been granted asylum, compared to an average of 46.5% in Greece.

GRANT OF REFUGEE STATUS

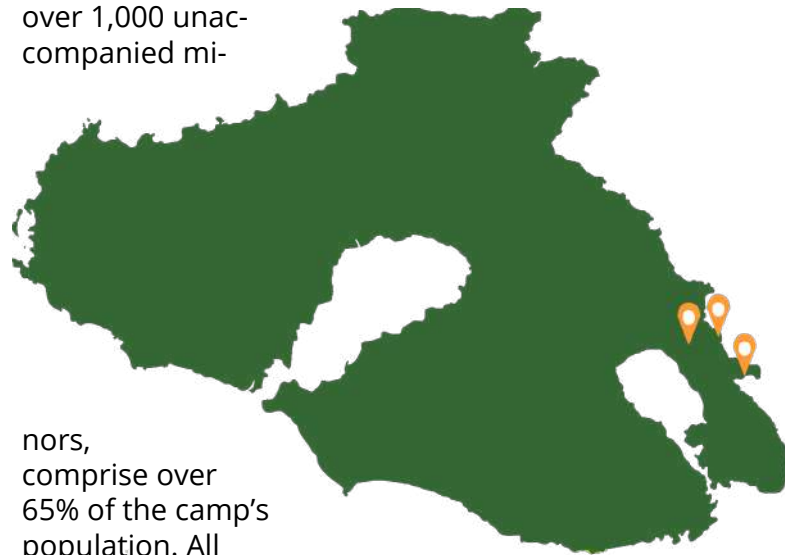


Where we work

Since August 2016, European Lawyers in Lesvos (ELIL) has provided assistance to asylum seekers in Moria camp on Lesvos, and in the surrounding informal settlement known as the 'Olive Grove'.

Over the course of 2019, the number of residents in Moria rose from 5,000 in January - already almost twice the camp's capacity - to 19,000 in December, with arrivals to the island almost doubling compared to the previous year.

On one day in August alone, 13 boats landed in the space of half an hour on the north shore of the island. Women and children, including over 1,000 unaccompanied mi-



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nors, comprise over 65% of the camp's population. All this against the backdrop of hardening attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers in Greece and across Europe.

ELIL provided assistance in our three dedicated consultation rooms in two containers in the Olive Grove, just outside the camp itself, to ensure that privacy and confidentiality are preserved, and in our office in Mytilini. We also operated in the detention centre within Moria.

To meet the growing need for legal assistance across the island, in December 2019 ELIL also began providing legal consultations and running info sessions in Kara Tepe, a camp housing 1,200 of the most vulnerable asylum seekers on Lesvos, the vast majority of them families with children.

In the latter half of the year, the ELIL team also began planning an additional new project in Samos. From summer 2020 our team of permanent Greek asylum lawyers and volunteer European asylum lawyers will provide legal information and assistance to asylum seekers in Vathy camp on Samos, where over 7,000 asylum seekers live in a camp with capacity for just 700.



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A watercolor illustration in shades of blue and green. In the foreground, a child is kneeling on the ground, looking at a book or document. Behind them, two other figures stand near a fence. A framed picture hangs on the wall in the background. The overall style is soft and artistic.

Beyond the numbers

"I slept outside on a mattress for 20 days. I think if I hadn't met ELIL I would maybe have slept on the streets forever. ELIL was helpful and useful - without a lawyer the children in Moria don't have their rights. The most important right is to have a lawyer."

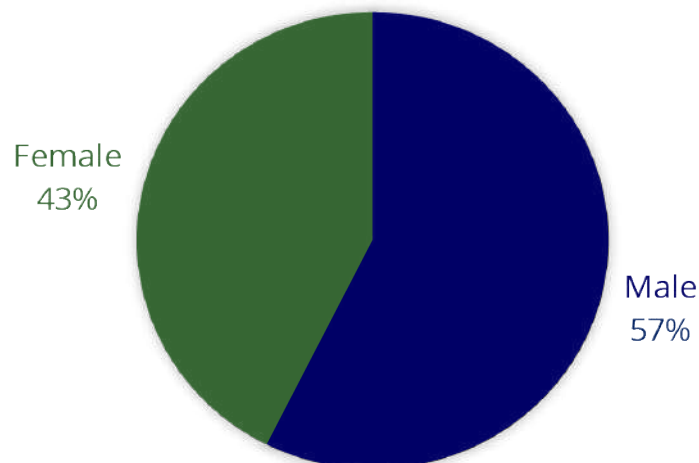
In summer 2019, as arrivals to Lesvos reached record highs, an unaccompanied child whose brother was already in northern Europe landed on the island and found themselves living alone in the informal settlement around Moria known as the 'Olive Grove'. As a result of ELIL's assistance, they have been recognised as a child, moved into the appropriate section of camp and their family reunification application has been accepted.



Our Activities

What we do

ELIL provides legal information and legal assistance to asylum seekers, in order to familiarise them with the asylum process and criteria, help them understand their rights and obligations and be fully prepared for their interview and/or submit their family reunification application, as relevant. Over the course of 2019, we provided assistance to more than 2,500 asylum seekers on Lesbos. Of those we assisted through legal consultations, 45.8% were female and 54.2% were male.



Interview preparation

Our primary activity in 2019 was providing legal advice to asylum seekers to help them prepare for their first instance asylum interview. In total, we assisted 1,383 individuals (608 cases in total). In each case, we aimed to provide at least two one-on-one consultations, unless the case was an emergency with a very short deadline, and where relevant also represented the applicant at interview.

Family reunification

We supported 413 individuals in filing applications for family reunification with family members in other EU member states (206 cases in total). In general, this involved liaising with the applicant and family members, collecting relevant documents and preparing the application, preparing a supporting legal memoran-

dum (where relevant) and following up with the Dublin Unit in Greece and other country.

Unaccompanied minors

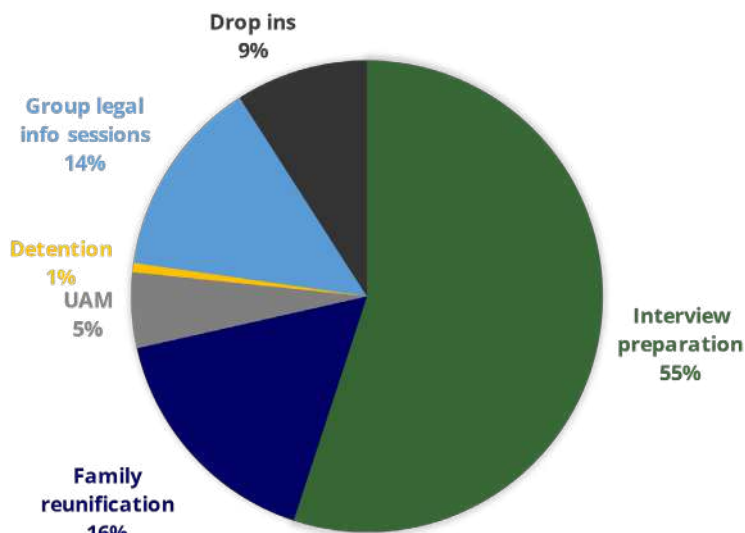
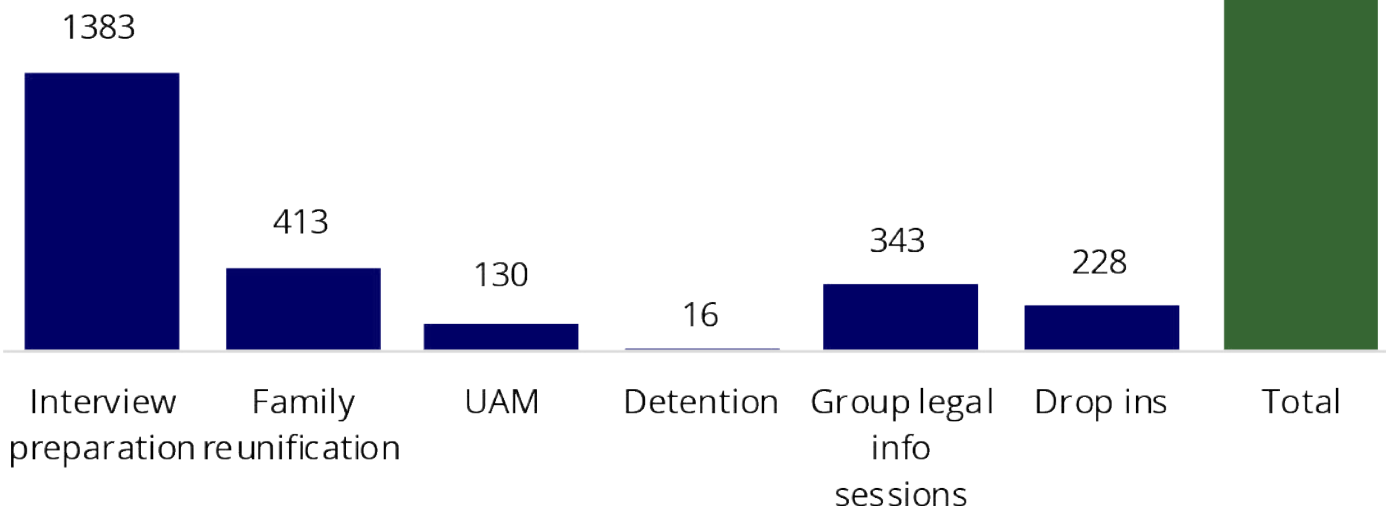
We also provided legal assistance, through one-on-one consultations, to minors (particularly unaccompanied minors and unaccompanied minors registered as adults). This included, where relevant, working to overturn the original age registration (collecting relevant documents, securing referrals for age assessment), providing information and advice regarding the legal procedure and assisting with family reunification applications. In total, we provided assistance to 130 unaccompanied minors. Of these, in 43 cases we assisted with regard to age assessment and in 87 we assisted with family reunification applications.

Detention

We provided legal assistance to asylum seekers in detention, both in relation to first instance interview preparation and, where relevant, for age assessment for individuals in detention who claimed to be minors. In total, we assisted 16 detained asylum seekers.

Group info sessions

We provided 10 group legal information sessions in Moria and 1 in Kara Tepe. These were attended by a total of 343 people. The main topics covered were the asylum procedure and the family reunification procedure.



Outreach

In 2019, we prepared a legal information leaflet in collaboration with Oxfam and the Greek Council for Refugees, which was translated into 10 languages and distributed to over 13,000 asylum seekers on Lesbos.

Drop-in queries

In October 2019, we began a new initiative whereby, each morning from 9.15 to 10.30, asylum seekers could come to ELIL's container in Moria with "drop-in" questions and see a lawyer without an appointment. From October 2019 to the end of the year, we assisted 228 asylum seekers with drop-in questions.



Beyond the numbers

"I was so happy the day I was released and taken to the minors section. For me, this was the moment I knew that I was in Europe. I believe that my lawyer really helped me and cared for my life - they were there to advise me whenever I needed help. I really appreciated their support, and that of the whole organisation. I was lucky to have a lawyer. Many minors don't have one and they are confused and don't know what to do"

In late 2019, an unaccompanied child was registered as an adult upon arrival to Lesvos and placed in detention. ELIL liaised with the police and the Greek Asylum service, accompanied the child to their interview and obtained a postponement and a referral for age assessment. We then submitted objections against detention at court, claiming the best interest of the child and that in the case of doubt, the benefit should always lie with the child. Following discussions with the judge, the child was released from detention and moved to the minors' section of camp.



Partnerships and Recognition

An expanding support base

In May, we reluctantly suspended programming in Moria camp due to funding constraints. After focusing for three months on achieving greater sustainability, diversifying our funding sources and building a strong team, we were able to resume work in August, just as arrival numbers began to spike dramatically.

Among our new partners, we were honoured to receive support from: Defence for Children International (DCI); Kids in Need of Defense (KIND); The Fred Foundation; Fondation Abbé Pierre; Stichting Vluchteling.

2019 also saw the Conseil National des Barreaux (CNB) join the Deutscher Anwaltverein (DAV) and the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) as a shareholder.

ELIL also began a fruitful new partnership, the "Greece Pro Bono Collaborative", with six major international law firms - White & Case, Allen & Overy, Ashurst, Orrick, Den-

tons and Charles Russell Speechlys. As part of the agreement, three lawyers from the firms volunteer with ELIL in Lesvos at all times.

In 2019, ELIL presented its work at several international conferences: DAV Annual Conference in Leipzig on 16 May; JUVE awards on 24 October; Lawyers Against Poverty event on 14 November; UNHCR Annual Consultation with NGOs in Geneva on 5 July; CNB's Human Rights Day event on 10 December.

Our partnership with Bryter

In autumn 2019, ELIL entered a cooperation with German legal tech company BRYTER, who developed software which our staff now uses daily and which enables our work to be more efficient and effective, allowing us to reach as many people as possible.

Cooperation in the Field

In 2019, we worked closely with legal actors on Lesbos and cooperate with other protection organisations, particularly UNHCR, IRC, ICRC, Médecins Sans Frontières and Médecins du Monde, who often referred vulnerable persons of concern to us for legal assistance. Our close cooperation with these organisations enabled us to share information and avoid duplication, identify areas of collaboration and leverage opportunities to complement each other's activities. We also engaged with the relevant authorities (Greek Asylum Service, European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) and the Greek Dublin Unit) to follow up on issues relating to cases.

Support from Bar Associations

Our work would not be possible without the on-going support of Bar Associations and Law Societies across Europe. In particular, we are extremely grateful to the following Bar Associations and Law Societies for their support in 2019:

- German Bar Association (DAV)
- Conseil National des Barreaux (CNB)
- Czech Bar Association
- Scottish Faculty of Advocates
- Liechtenstein Bar Association
- Swedish Bar Association
- Icelandic Bar Association
- Bar of Ireland
- Law Society of Ireland
- Law Society of Northern Ireland
- Bar of Northern Ireland
- Polish Bar of Attorneys-at-Law
- Polish Bar Council
- Swiss Bar Association
- Bernischer Anwaltsverband
- Ordre des avocats Vaudois
- Geneva Bar Association
- Ordine degli avvocati del Canton Ticino
- Ordre des barreaux francophones et germanophone de Belgique (AVOCATS.BE)
- Barreau de Liège
- Barreau de Lyon
- Barreau de Paris
- Barreau de Rennes

International Awards

In 2019, ELIL's work in Greece was recognised through the following prizes:

The PILnet Global Award for Local Pro Bono Impact, which celebrates and honours the extraordinary efforts made by individuals, law firms, and NGOs to strengthen civil society, advance social justice, and protect the public interest around the which celebrates and honours world.

The Pax Christi International Peace Prize, an award made to individuals and organisations who make a stand for peace, justice and nonviolence in different parts of the world.

The Spendengeldern der 2019 JUVE AWARDS, which chose ELIL as its international charity of the year, in recognition of its work to provide legal assistance to asylum seekers on Lesbos.

In this excerpt from the acceptance of the PILnet award, Phil Worthington, ELIL Managing Director, gives an example of the importance of legal support to asylum seekers:

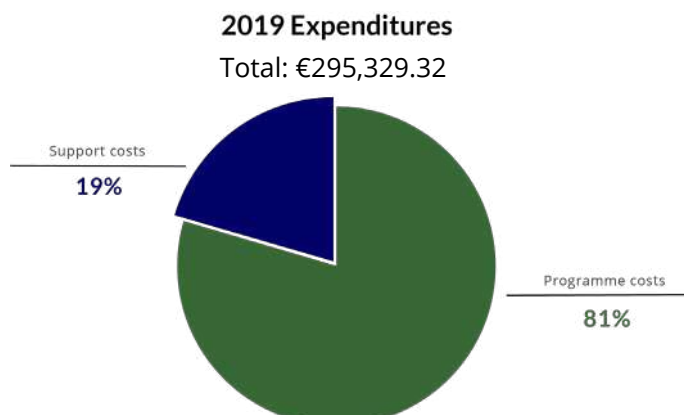
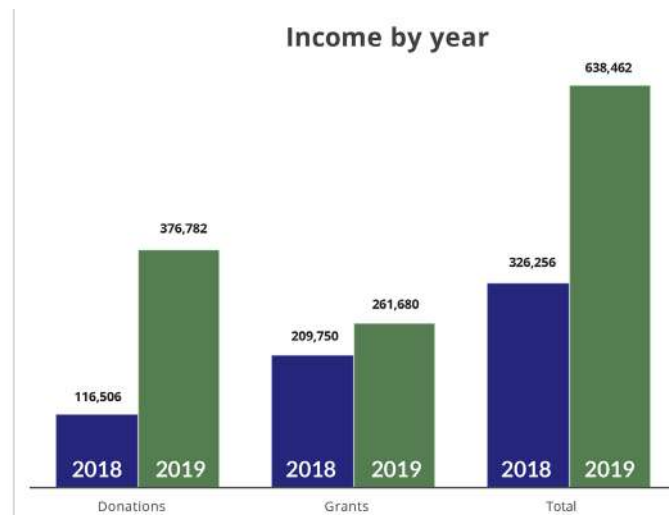
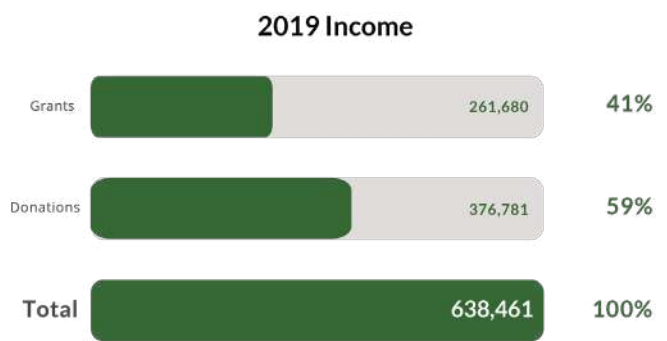




Financial Reports

An increased budget

ELIL's budget increased in 2019 compared to the previous year. Over the course of the year, we successfully worked to identify new funding sources and diversify our funding base, decreasing our reliance on large institutional grants.



Our team

In the course of 2019, ELIL was able to expand its staff significantly, from six to fourteen permanent employees. At the start of the year, our programming was run by a core team consisting of the Managing Director, two Greek asylum lawyers (one as Legal Coordinator), two interpreters and a highly trained, hard working group of two volunteer lawyers and two legal assistants.

By the end of the year, our team had grown significantly, striking a highly productive balance between permanent staff and shorter-term volunteers. As of December 2019, our core staff

All of our volunteer asylum lawyers were practising and experienced European asylum lawyers who are members of a European Bar Association or Law Society and were identified through a rigorous selection process.

Further to our staff, in August 2019, we began a cooperation with six major international law firms through which three lawyers from these firms (cumulatively) volunteered with ELIL at all times (see Partnerships).



on Lesbos included four full-time Greek asylum lawyers (one as Legal Coordinator), the Managing Director, a Project Manager, a Project Officer, five professional Arabic and Farsi interpreters, a Finance Manager and a Fundraising and Media Manager. In addition, our team included up to six volunteer European asylum lawyers and two volunteer legal assistants. Each volunteer asylum lawyer stayed for a minimum of three weeks and our volunteer legal assistants stayed for a minimum of three months.

Volunteers

In the course of 2019, we welcomed 55 volunteers to our team in Lesbos (45 volunteer lawyers, 10 legal assistants). In total, they contributed over 6,000 hours of voluntary work.

Special thanks

We would like to express our profound gratitude to our volunteers, staff and supporters for all your assistance throughout 2019. Our work would not be possible without the incredible efforts of our staff and volunteers and the extremely generous support of people from across Europe and beyond. Your support is critical in enabling us to continue our work to defend human rights, uphold the rule of law and provide asylum seekers with meaningful access to legal assistance.



Would you like to know more?

Our social platforms:



Our website:

<https://www.europeanlawyersinlesvos.eu>

Support us:





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