

2023

MIT ANNUAL REPORT



MOBILE
INFO TEAM

WHO WE ARE

Mobile Info Team (MIT) is a non-profit organisation based in Thessaloniki, northern Greece, providing people on the move - refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented people - with vital information and assistance throughout the asylum process. We offer general and individualised information through our WhatsApp and Facebook hotlines, as well as in-depth, longer-term case assistance which is provided by our Greek lawyer and Senior Caseworkers. By giving people a thorough understanding of their rights, obligations and options, we strive to empower them to act with dignity and autonomy, whilst avoiding unnecessary risk. We also raise awareness and advocate for changes to the asylum system in Greece and Europe, publishing reports about asylum conditions and detention, and working to end the practice of pushbacks as part of the Border Violence Monitoring Network.

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INTRODUCTION

In many ways 2023 has been a devastating year for the communities we support. A significant increase in people arriving to Greece coincided with the continuation of drastic cuts to asylum and reception services - leaving people seeking international protection exposed to homelessness, destitution and pushbacks. After years of dysfunction, people seeking safety in Greece are still met with a system which fails to respect their right to asylum and dignified reception conditions, while we have seen the situation worsen in some areas with the exponential increase in the use of detention for people on the move.

This year Mobile Info Team continued to provide vital information and undertake legal casework supporting asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented people, responding to over 9,000 enquiries on our WhatsApp and Facebook hotlines, and reaching over 1.7 million people through weekly Facebook information posts, which keep people informed about their rights and options. This work continues to be vital given the persistent reduction in support services available to people on the move in Greece. More than ever we see the vital importance of information provision which allows people to make informed decisions and understand their legal rights.



In 2023, UNHCR recorded 48,721 arrivals by both sea and land in Greece, a sharp increase from the figure of 18,780 during 2022.

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MESSAGE FROM OUR TEAM

In 2023 Mobile Info Team continued to undertake advocacy for a fairer asylum system in Greece and across Europe. Our research documented rights violations within Greece's asylum system which have become shockingly commonplace in recent years. At the same time, we advocated against the extensive use of administrative detention for asylum seekers and undocumented people within prison-like sites on the Greek mainland.

"Sadly, advocating for the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and people without papers in Greece has never been more vital.

Detention is now used as a blanket practice by Greek authorities as opposed to a measure of last resort. People on the move including asylum seekers are detained on vaguely defined grounds for extensive periods of time, despite the extremely low numbers of people actually deported from Greece. The conditions are shocking - people are incarcerated in dilapidated structures and denied their basic rights to healthcare and decent living conditions.

With the EU institutions reaching an agreement on the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, there is no doubt that it will have a huge impact on access to asylum in Europe and lead to even greater use of detention. We need to continue this work to ensure that we channel the experiences of asylum seekers and people on the move to hold those in positions of power to account."



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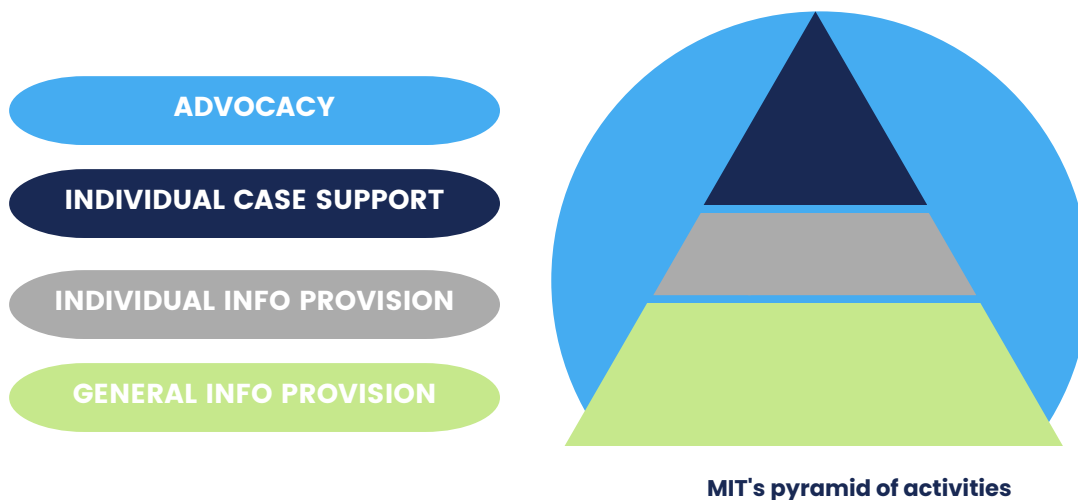
"We need to continue this work to ensure that we channel the experiences of asylum seekers and people on the move to hold those in positions of power to account."

Mobile Info Team Advocacy Team

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WHAT WE DO

Since MIT was established eight years ago we have developed our *Triangle of Support* to guide our work, empowering people to exercise their legal rights. Through this model we provide accessible information in a language people accessing our services can understand, while using the vast amount of information we receive through individual information requests to raise awareness of the complex issues that people seeking safety in Greece face, and to advocate for a fairer asylum system in Greece and Europe.



We offer support at different levels, ensuring that we use our capacity effectively and can identify the level of support required by people reaching out for assistance. This model allows us to provide in-depth follow up and holistic support for a select number of cases, while also reaching large numbers of people through more general information provision, regarding the Greek asylum procedure and many other topics.



“I am grateful to your good team. Personally, several big administrative problems were solved with the help of your team colleagues. Your team’s activities are highly appreciated”

Hotline enquiry

General information provision

We provide general information through our Facebook page and our website in six languages – Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, French, Kurdish and English. Through static information on our website and weekly Facebook posts, we help ensure that people on the move are updated with accurate information about new developments in the Greek asylum system and other important topics - including integration, family reunification, and measures to legalise the stay of undocumented people. Our information is clear, practical and actionable, offering a reliable source to help people navigate complex bureaucratic processes and understand key changes in the law which may impact them. This work is vital given the systemic deficiencies in information provision to asylum seekers and undocumented people in Greece, and the risks they face from scamming and inaccurate information provision.

At the end of 2023 we had amassed almost **68,000 followers** on our Facebook page, having gained 2,000 new followers during the year. We published 47 posts on Facebook with a **reach of over 1.7 million** and received almost **half a million interactions** (likes, comments and shares).

We covered subjects such as:

- Eligibility for Greek citizenship
- How to apply for asylum if you have been persecuted based on your sexual orientation or gender identity
- How to rectify incorrect data on an asylum seeker card
- The discontinuation of access to many services of the Asylum Offices for multiple weeks, due to a computer system update
- The importance of credibility in the asylum interview
- The temporary discontinuation of the only integration programme for beneficiaries of international protection and the impact of this.
- The different possibilities for reuniting with family members



Example Facebook post



Our most popular post this year was Information on receiving a residence permit on exceptional grounds after residing in Greece seven years. It reached almost 60,000 people and received more than 2000 reactions.

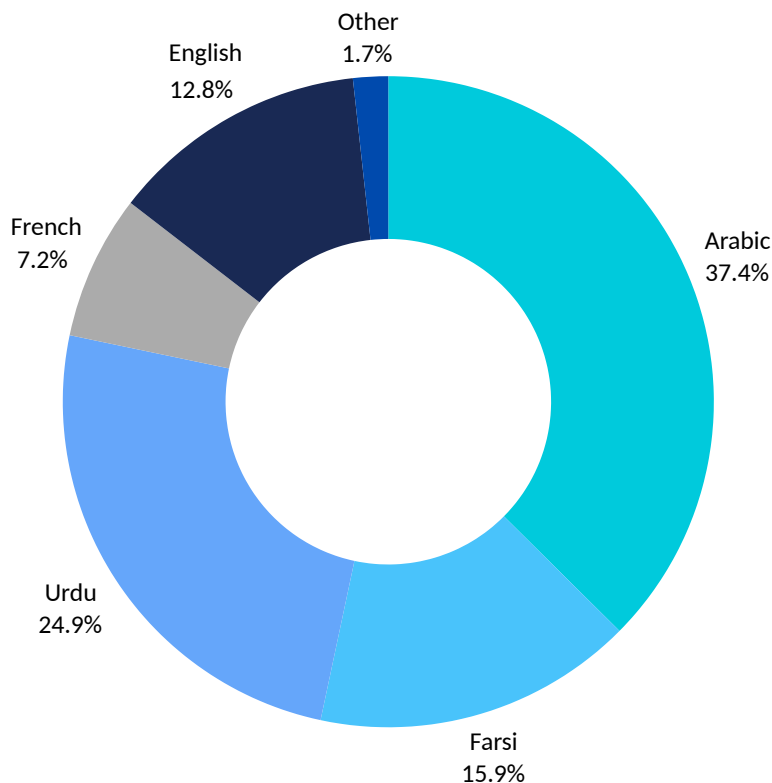
Individual information provision

Through our hotlines on WhatsApp, Facebook and email, we provide personalised information provision to individuals, tailored to their specific situation. Most of our individual information provision is carried out online, which allows us to reach people **throughout the entirety of Greece**, including the islands and in remote camps on the mainland where people are frequently isolated and cut off from support.

Our legally trained caseworkers work with our translators to respond to people's enquiries, covering an incredibly wide scope of topics. Caseworkers support people not only with their legal enquiries but also with **referrals to other actors for more specialised support, from mental health support to employability programmes**, among many others. Throughout 2023 our caseworkers and translators responded to an average of **670 individuals every month** via WhatsApp and Facebook.

To ensure we can also assist people who do not have access to technology, lack confidence navigating online, or are not literate, we also undertake in-person information provision sessions in different locations across northern Greece. These sessions are vital to ensure our services are inclusive and also benefit harder to reach groups. **In 2023, we delivered 75 information sessions in person.** We delivered twice-weekly information sessions at our partner organisation Wave, a project based in Thessaloniki providing food distribution primarily to undocumented single men. We also travelled further afield to provide information at community centres based in Serres and Ioannina run by Lifting Hands International and Habibi Works, covering a range of topics depending on the needs of the population residing there.

Mobile Info Team met over 650 people at our in person information sessions in 2023, providing invaluable support and information to people on the move.



Enquiries by language on our hotlines in 2023 (%)

◆ Individual case support

Our in-depth casework provides longer-term support to more complex legal cases which require supervision by a lawyer. Inadequate access to legal aid in Greece and the financial barriers inherent in acquiring a private lawyer mean that this service remains an invaluable and critical component in our attempts to improve the situation for asylum seekers and refugees. The cases which we take on often take months if not years to resolve and may require collaboration with social workers, medical professionals as well as other actors. In these cases, we not only address the immediate legal needs of the individual in question, but undertake a holistic approach in which we ensure that the individual has the tools and resources to continue with their lives before closing the case. To facilitate this, we often continue to offer additional tailored support on other important issues, like accessing housing, integration support and mental health assistance, even after the legal issue has been resolved.

In 2023, our individual case support team **successfully resolved 50 cases**. Our Greek lawyer, casework manager and two senior caseworkers worked to assist people with issues **including subsequent asylum applications for initially rejected vulnerable asylum applicants, release from administrative detention, and family reunification cases**.

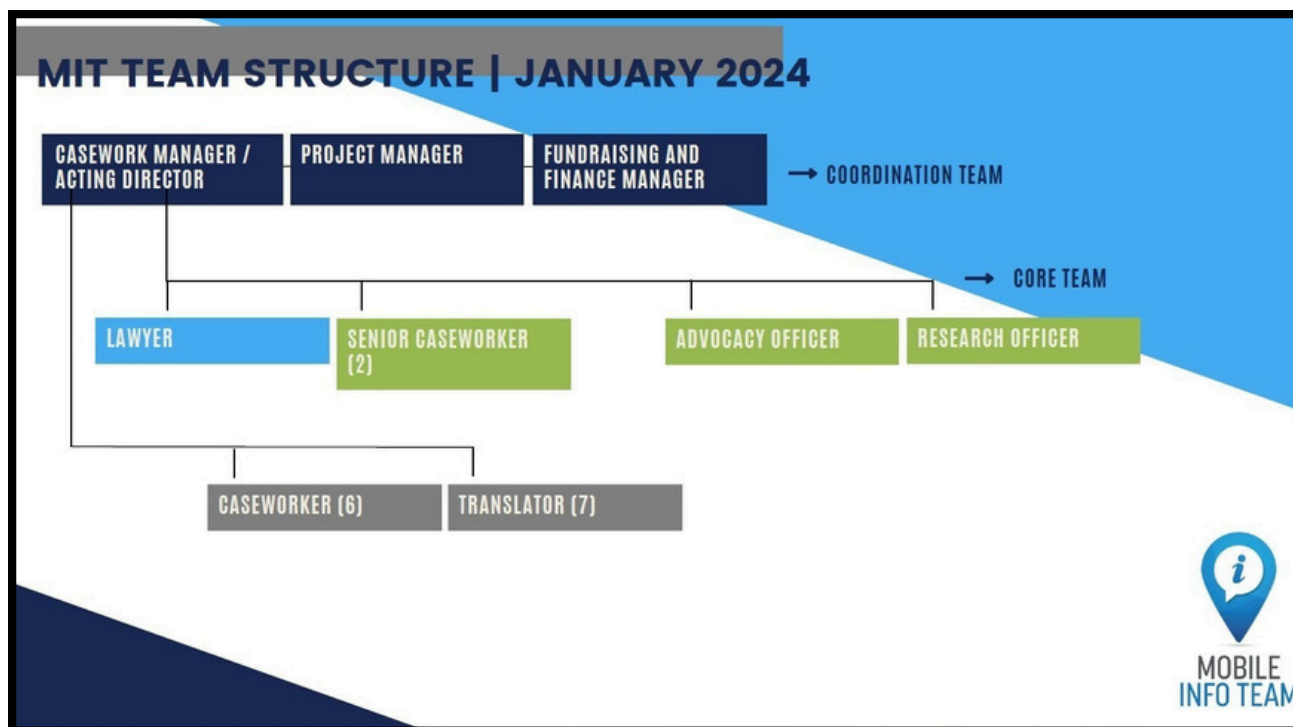
Early in 2023 our case support team strategically prioritised cases relating to Greece's residence permit on the basis of exceptional grounds, **which allows irregular staying third country nationals to legalise their stay**. As this law provision is due to change in April 2024, we focused on ensuring that as many eligible people as possible are able to apply for this residence permit before the change of the law comes into effect. This is a key priority for us, as many marginalised people who were unlikely to receive status otherwise were eligible for this. We were able to begin the application process with over twenty individuals, many of which are ongoing as the application process takes a considerable amount of time.

◆ Advocacy and research

As highlighted in our pyramid, our advocacy work is informed by daily interactions with people on the move through information provision and in-depth casework. We draw on our extensive casework database to identify the key topics and challenges faced by the communities we support, and conduct research to better understand the barriers they face when attempting to navigate complex, dysfunctional and discriminatory systems. We use our evidence to advocate for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees in Greece and push for systemic change. We do this by publishing reports, briefings and statements, and by sharing our expertise with other stakeholders, including journalists, members of the European parliament and UN representatives.

ORGANISATIONAL UPDATE

With the establishment of our core team in 2023, which can be seen in our team structure, we have been able to create an opportunity and environment to identify action points and shared priorities within MIT. With monthly meetings we are able to clarify decision making processes and structures and work more efficiently as a team.



In March, MIT expanded the capacity of the Advocacy Team with a new full-time role. Our Research Officer now collaborates with our Advocacy Officer to further our advocacy and research efforts, leading our data collection on access to asylum, detention and other topics, and building networks and collaborations with researchers and actors across Greece and further afield.

Following a digital security training given by [Frontline Defenders](#) in 2022, in 2023 we fully implemented our digital security policy for the entire team. Changes have included the use of a password management software, the implementation of a cloud and physical backup plan and regular running of virus scanners. We implemented this in order to ensure that we are fully protecting the sensitive data which we receive and will continue to update our digital security processes.

Elsewhere we welcomed several new team members to MIT and noted a decreased turnover in caseworkers. This has freed up capacity previously spent on training new caseworkers and meant that our caseworkers are better placed to answer the enquiries which come in on our hotlines.



Team Photo December 2023



MIT Info Sessions Throughout 2023

EXTERNAL CONTEXT

The year 2023 saw several dreadful events in Greece. Continuous threats and criminal charges against people on the move, including asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented people marked a pattern of intimidation. Ongoing concerns regarding media freedom and the rule of law were highlighted by Greece's low ranking in media freedom, government interference in media, abusive court proceedings and an overall unsafe working environment for journalists and civil society actors. A wiretapping scandal which erupted in 2022 and revealed the National Intelligence Service (EYP) was spying on several journalists and politicians is still being investigated. A deadly train crash in Tempi in February that killed 57 passengers revived concerns around political impunity in Greece. After the June legislative elections, the New Democracy Party renewed its power for a four-year consecutive term. Following a heavy-handed migration agenda, the government has increased the use of immigration detention while it has under-resourced or closed available protection services. Often expressing xenophobic statements, the ruling party has proclaimed the completion of the Evros fence by 2025 and an increase in deportations.

Greece: Violence against migrants 'normalized' — MSF

By  DW | Published on : 2023/11/02

Media headline 2023

In 2023, UNHCR recorded 48,721 arrivals by both sea and land in Greece, a sharp increase from the figure of 18,780 during 2022. The increase in the number of people arriving was paired with the continued erosion of the rights and protection provided to people on the move. Criminalisation of people on the move was widespread, with more than 2000 third country nationals currently incarcerated in Greek prisons, facing smuggling charges or accusations, according to data published by Borderline Europe. A striking rise of 697% in asylum detention orders between 2021 and 2022 marks the excessive use of detention measures for asylum applicants.

Access to asylum and dignified reception conditions was highly restricted during 2023. In December 2022, the Greek government closed the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA II) scheme. This EU-funded programme provided vulnerable asylum seekers with housing accommodation, psychosocial and medical support. As a result of the programme's defunding, thousands of beneficiaries were evicted or forced to move to official camps, which led to interruptions in their employment, education and medical treatment.

HELIOS, an integration programme providing rental subsidies, employment support and language classes for beneficiaries of International Protection in Greece, was also interrupted several times for extended periods of time towards the end of the year. According to the media, such disruptions resulted in around 4,000 beneficiaries being at risk of homelessness and 500 employees risking losing their jobs. In addition to the interruption of HELIOS's services, it was also not possible for new beneficiaries to enrol in the programme between the beginning of October 2023 and the end of January 2024. The Helios Project is currently the only integration programme for beneficiaries of International Protection, who generally are at a high risk of homelessness and destitution.

Significant dysfunction in Greece's asylum system continued in 2023 following the long-awaited establishment of a new system for applying for asylum on the mainland. Between early May and late July, most of the operations of Greek asylum authorities were suspended due to an upgrade of the Asylum Service's computer system. MIT joined five other legal aid organisations to cosign a joint statement which highlighted the significant impact of the upgrade on accessing asylum procedures. While some operations of the Asylum Service were reinstated at the end of July, the online platform for requesting asylum registration appointments remained out of operation for a continuous period of three and a half months, drastically reducing access to asylum for applicants resident on the mainland, Crete and Rhodes.

As many as 17,251 beneficiaries have ceased receiving the subsidies. These persons are unable to continue renting property and most end up homeless on the street (RSA,2023)

The wider crisis in Greece's asylum and reception system was highlighted in 2023 by industrial action by staff of the Asylum Service and Reception and Identification Service, who collectively denounced long-standing under-resourcing, persistent technical problems, and precarious working conditions. In October, the main provider of interpretation services for asylum procedures, Metadrasi, released a statement announcing sweeping cuts to its services due to long payment delays by the Asylum Ministry, drastically impacting provision of information and the processing of asylum claims across Greece.

In **January**, the trial of 24 human rights defenders charged for their actions in rescuing people at sea, began in Lesvos. The case brought international attention, with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights calling for their dismissal. This trial, which constitutes the largest case of criminalisation of solidarity, highlights the shrinking space that civil society faces in Greece and other EU countries.

In **May**, The New York Times reported on a pushback of twelve people off the coast of Lesvos, which included video evidence. This resulted in an increase of pressure on Greek authorities to be held accountable for the practice of illegal pushbacks on both the Greek sea and land borders. In August, UN experts requested detailed information from Greek authorities on the incident and urged them to "ensure a transparent and impartial investigation."

In **May**, in a series of smear campaign actions and unfounded prosecutions initiated against him, Panayote Dimitras, head of the Greek Helsinki Monitor learned via media reports that the Anti-Money Laundering Authority had ordered the freezing of his assets pending an investigation of alleged misuse of funding related to his organisation's work.

On **June** 14th, the situation of people on the move trying to reach European shores was yet again put in the spotlight when the Adriana ship sank off the coast of Pylos. With an estimated 750 people onboard, there were only 104 survivors. Nine of those survivors were unfairly accused of several charges, including smuggling and remain in pretrial detention on the Greek mainland. In September, forty of the survivors filed a criminal complaint against those responsible.

In **July**, the European Commission's 2023 Rule of Law Report highlighted the shrinking space for civil society. In their joint submission to the Commission's report, non-governmental organisations showcased Greece's failure to comply with the rule of law principles, including violations relating to confidentiality of communications, pushbacks, and the targeting of NGOs and human rights defenders.

Hundreds of refugees and migrants feared dead and missing in worst sea tragedy off Greece in recent years

Joint Press Release: UNHCR and IOM call for coordinated action and safe pathways

UNHCR/IOM Joint Press Release on the Pylos Shipwreck, June 2023

In the midst of wildfires which engulfed the Evros region in **August**, the bodies of at least 18 people on the move including two children were found. This highlighted an additional risk to people on the move who are already facing violent pushbacks by authorities. Racist violence escalated as vigilantes engaged in illegal violent acts against refugees and migrants, whom they accused of being responsible for the fires.

On **October** 27th, Israel launched a large-scale invasion of the Gaza strip, following an attack by Hamas. To date, intensive Israeli bombing has killed more than 28,000 Palestinians and destroyed or damaged 70 percent of Gaza's homes, while causing a severe humanitarian crisis and massive human displacement. Despite fleeing war, humanitarian organisations report that Palestinians who try to reach Greek territory face yet more violence in the form of illegal pushbacks. Even after reaching Greek territory, recognised refugees report through MIT's hotlines that they are facing huge challenges in bringing their families from Gaza.

In **November**, the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR) published its [2022 report](#) on informal forced returns, estimating that at least 2,157 persons are included in the total number of the alleged victims between April 2020 and October 2022. These figures show only a fraction of people trying to reach Greek territory. [The Border Violence Monitoring Network \(BVMN\)](#) collected testimonies during the same period reporting pushback incidents impacting more than 12,000 people.

In **December**, negotiations on the New Pact of Migration and Asylum came to a close in Brussels, with the European Parliament and the Council [reaching](#) a political agreement. As highlighted by [civil society organisations](#) across the continent, the new pact normalises the arbitrary use of immigration detention, including for children and families, increases racial profiling, uses “crisis” procedures to enable pushbacks, and return individuals to so called “safe third countries” where they are at risk of violence, torture, and arbitrary imprisonment. MIT was among over 50 organisations which signed an [open letter](#) to negotiators in the European Commission, the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and the European Parliament ahead of the final negotiations on the EU Pact on Migration, highlighting the devastating consequences of this Pact.

Over 50 NGOs pen eleventh-hour open letter to EU on human rights risks in Migration Pact

IOM and UNHCR welcome new amendment facilitating access to labour for migrants and asylum-seekers



Media headlines 2023

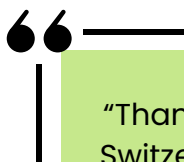
The same month, an [amendment](#) to the Immigration Code was adopted in Greece. In light of workforce shortages, mostly in agriculture, tourism and construction sector, the [new bill](#) introduces a residence permit for undocumented migrants who have lived in Greece continuously during the last three years. IOM and UNHCR [welcomed](#) the amendment as a measure with the potential to alleviate barriers undocumented people face when accessing the job market and socio-economic rights.

CASE STUDY: UNACCOMPANIED MINOR

As highlighted by [Save the Children](#), the challenges faced by unaccompanied minors in Greece are entrenched. Without the guidance of a legal guardian many former and current unaccompanied minors slip and are left highly vulnerable, undocumented and without support. There is the possibility for them to apply for the right to remain in Greece on humanitarian grounds. However, a large number of minors face the systemic lack of access to legal aid, let alone the lack of information which is adequate for minors and in an appropriate language.

This was the case for Hassan (name changed for anonymity), an unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan. Like many others, he had fallen through the cracks of the support systems available in Greece, sleeping rough in the streets, without any documents, unprotected and at severe risk of falling prey to trafficking due to his vulnerability. He had been in the asylum system before, but had lost his asylum seeker card and did not know how to continue in the procedure. He also distrusted Greek authorities and organisations, preventing him from asking for support.

MIT caseworkers encountered him at a community centre of one of our partners. Our continuous presence there twice a week made it possible for Hassan to slowly trust us and open up about his situation. Hassan told us that he had previously been enrolled in a programme aiming to relocate asylum seekers from Greece to other European countries. However, due to the difficulties inherent in being a person on the move in Greece, a minor and alone without a supportive network, he had lost contact with the authorities in charge of relocation and had been taken off the programme.



“Thank you for your help. The ticket has arrived. I will go to Switzerland one day. Thank you all. Thank you very much.”

A client we assisted in his family reunification case to be reunited with his younger brother in Switzerland



Our casework team decided to take on Hassan’s case. As the relocation programme in question had already been discontinued, it provided a considerable challenge for him to re-enter it. Hassan’s situation was exacerbated as he faced homelessness, while being left without legal and psychosocial support. After many months of hard work and collaborations with social workers, medical professionals and various other actors, our team was successfully able to re-enrol Hassan in the relocation programme.

In the final days of 2023, he was relocated and is now beginning a new chapter of his life. Cases such as these often require assistance which is outside the bounds of purely legal support. In taking a holistic approach to these cases we are able to ensure that the multifaceted needs of the individual are taken into consideration. We therefore not only act as legal actors in such cases but ensure that the foundations are in place for these individuals to continue with their lives, with the best possible opportunities.

ADVOCACY AND RESEARCH



Our advocacy is informed by our information provision and casework. We focus on the topics most frequently cited as issues by the people we support. Therefore, our efforts remain relevant and timely.

In 2023 Mobile Info Team continued to advocate for better access to the asylum procedure in Greece and expanded our focus to include the widespread use of administrative detention for asylum seekers and third country nationals. We finished a long-term research project examining conditions in pre-removal detention facilities on the Greek mainland, in collaboration with Border Criminologies at Oxford University. The project resulted in a report, “Prison for Papers”: Last Resort Measures Used as Standard Procedure, which was published in February 2023 along with two other reports issued by our partners on violence in pre-removal detention on the mainland and de facto detention in the Samos CCAC. Collectively these reports highlight the systemic use of detention for asylum seekers and third country nationals in Greece, and the appalling conditions in which people are held within pre-removal facilities.

During the year we published two reports as MIT:

Report: “Prison for Papers”
Last Resort Measures Used as Standard Procedure

Report: Protection Unavailable:
Dysfunctional Practices and Restrictions on the Right to Asylum

MOBILE INFO TEAM

MOBILE INFO TEAM

SUMMARY of FULL REPORT
2023

“Prison for Papers”:
Last Resort Measures as Standard Procedure
Researching Pre-removal Detention Centres on Mainland Greece

An error occurred.
An error occurred.
An error occurred.

If you are the system administrator
error log for details.

Faithfully yours, nginx.

Protection Unavailable:
Dysfunctional Practices and Restrictions on the Right to Asylum
Assessing the implementation of reception and identification procedures on mainland Greece

We shared our research with journalists, partners and representatives from UN and EU bodies. We drafted and cosigned statements, joint letters, and briefings, and had our research published by the media and referenced in reports by ASGI and PICUM. Our work was published by key platforms such as ReliefWeb and referenced in the AIDA 2022 report on Greece.

In 2023 our Greek lawyer joined a group of legal practitioners advocating for improvements in the Greek asylum system. As MIT we signed a joint letter to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum requesting specific improvements in access to asylum.

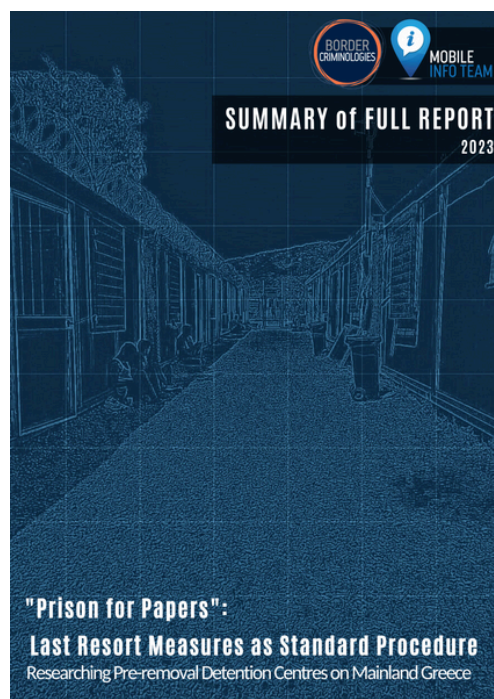
Throughout the year we continued to build alliances with MEPs and submitted Parliamentary Questions concerning access to asylum and detention in Greece. We received responses to our queries on detention centres in Greece from the European Commission, providing a basis for future advocacy ensuring Greece's compliance with EU legal standards.

In 2023, we also saw the long-term impact of our research from previous years. During the year, our report on the living conditions of refugees and asylum seekers in Greece published in 2021 was referenced in two court decisions of German administrative courts (here and here) and the Austrian Federal administrative court (here). Furthermore, the report is currently a source of information for three German administrative courts about the situation of those entitled to international protection in Greece. Since its publication the report has been referenced in court decisions in Germany, Austria and Belgium, including in six decisions of the Austrian Federal Administrative Court, as well as in five decisions of German High Administrative Courts. All German court decisions have ruled that the return of most beneficiaries of international protection to Greece is currently not possible, due to a lack of dignified living conditions in Greece.

◆ Report – *Detention in Greece*

In February, our report "Prison for Papers": Last Resort Measures Used as Standard Procedure was published in collaboration with the Border Criminologies project at the University of Oxford. The report focuses on the detention of applicants of international protection and third country nationals subject to return orders who have been detained at some point between 2020 and 2022 in one of six Pre-removal Detention Centres (PRDCs) on mainland Greece. The report explored questions around access to asylum, legal procedures and detention conditions.

Since the implementation of the International Protection Act in 2020, and subsequent amendments, the use of detention for people on the move, instead of being a last resort measure, has become systematic and embedded in Greek law. Interviews with people subjected to detention in Greece indicated the arbitrary use of this measure, both in terms of the grounds and length of time that people are detained.



Due to the lack of any reasonable prospect of removal in Greece, the deprivation of liberty for many of our respondents was not lawfully justified.

The report found that detention measures and practices in Greece are not only ineffective, but clearly do not comply with fundamental rights, under international, EU and Greek law. It revealed a highly concerning **lack of legal assistance available to people detained within pre-removal facilities on the Greek mainland**. Those who cannot afford expensive lawyer fees are left without information or advice. The situation is exacerbated by the **critical lack of translators in mainland detention centres**. The carceral environments of PRDCs, coupled with **dilapidated structures, dysfunctional amenities, and unsanitary conditions** in addition to a **fundamental lack of access to healthcare** has a significant impact on the physical and psychological wellbeing of detainees.

Among other recommendations to the Greek state and EU Commission, we asked the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) to conduct a country visit to Greece, to investigate conditions within PRDCs, some of which had not been visited for over five years. In late November 2023, the CPT carried out a country visit to Greece, including all five pre-removal detention facilities on the mainland, marking a huge success for our advocacy team. The CPT's findings from the country visit are expected to be published in 2024.

As part of the dissemination of the report we delivered a webinar, European Regimes of Detention, in collaboration with Border Criminologies and the Border Violence Monitoring Network. The webinar brought together experts for an exchange of views on detention practices across European contexts and was viewed by almost 300 people.

The report was additionally covered in the Greek press and in features by Open Democracy, Border Criminologies and Melting Pot. We also shared learnings from the research on a podcast by Refocus Lab dedicated to our report.



Media headline 2023 (left), Panel discussion 2023 (right)

In 2023 we drew on our detention research to advocate for change at an international level. Our findings were shared with UN mechanisms including the Special Rapporteur on Torture, in collaboration with our partners I Have Rights and the Border Violence Monitoring Network, and in a speech delivered by our team during a UN Day of General Discussion concerning torture prevention in detention.

Statement – Suspension of Asylum Registrations

In June, we published a [joint statement](#) highlighting the shutdown of the Greek Asylum Service database, which halted asylum registrations and left asylum seekers and recognised refugees in limbo. The statement highlighted the suspension of most operations of the asylum authorities between 5th May and 7th June, due to an upgrade of the service's computer system Alkyoni. During this period, key operations were suspended including registration of asylum claims, renewal of asylum seeker cards, and issuance of residence permits, travel documents, and other documentation, leaving people in limbo and without legal documents protecting them from arbitrary detention. The signatories called on the Migration Ministry to take action to ensure fair and equal access to the asylum procedure by reinstating all asylum processes and ensuring that the Asylum Service has adequate staff, IT systems and resources to carry out its work effectively.

Following the statement, some functions of the Asylum Service were reinstated. However, the platform for booking first registration appointments remained inactive for a continuous period of three and a half months, which we continued to highlight through our [social media channels](#).

Report – Protection Unavailable

In November 2023 we published our report [Protection Unavailable: Dysfunctional Practices and Restrictions on the Right to Asylum](#) in collaboration with Refugee Legal Support. The report examined the impacts of policy changes in 2021 and 2022 which led to a new system for applying for asylum in mainland Greece, Crete and Rhodes, introduced in September 2022. Under the new procedure for applying for international protection, applicants who cannot prove their identity with a document issued by a Greek public authority must undergo reception and identification procedures within one of two screening facilities on the Greek mainland, located close to Athens and Thessaloniki. The screening procedure is mandatory for most people wishing to apply for asylum in Greece, and involves a police interview, medical check, vulnerability assessment and the registration of the asylum claim. During this procedure applicants' movement is restricted to the screening facility, for an initial period of five days which may be extended up to 25 days.

The report documented the experiences of 19 people who applied for asylum after the establishment of the mainland RICs in September 2022. We found that, 14 months after the establishment of two RICs for the screening and registration of asylum claims on the Greek mainland, **access to asylum continues to be highly restricted**. After years of mismanagement, **structural deficiencies in the Greek asylum system remain, limiting access to international protection and placing people at risk of destitution and detention**.

Our analysis revealed continued structural deficiencies including: blanket 25-day *de facto* detention measures imposed on asylum seekers, which **limits their ability to access legal support services; no effective access to international protection within legal time frames** laid out in EU and Greek law. This leaves applicants without access to basic rights and services, and **vulnerable to arbitrary detention; and a critical lack of a standard procedure to identify vulnerable persons**, leading to deprivation of medical and psychosocial support.

The report was covered by the Greek newspaper [Efsyn](#) as well as by [Melting Pot](#), and was referenced in features by the [EU Observer](#) and [InfoMigrants](#). Through our partner Refugee Legal Support we also shared the report with solicitors, barristers, law firms, campaigners and other organisations that work with people on the move in the UK and beyond.

Greece: Victims of torture detained under 'dysfunctional' asylum system, NGOs warn

By **INFO MIGRANTS** Marion MacGregor | Published on : 2023/11/16

EU Advocacy – Fighting the New Pact on Migration

In December 2023 the European Union passed new legislation which will have disastrous consequences for the right to asylum in Europe and the treatment of people seeking international protection. The Pact will roll out a system similar to what is already in place in Greece across all EU member states, including the blanket detention of asylum seekers and a fundamental lack of safeguards to protect the rights of people on the move.

Throughout the year we contributed to joint briefings to equip MEPs with evidence to push against the most harmful aspects of the Pact. During the final stages of negotiations we used our Protection Unavailable report to put pressure on the European Parliament to push for key amendments and safeguards in the proposed legislation, to mitigate against its devastating impact for people on the move. To influence discussions around the Screening Regulation - one of the key files in the new Pact - we shared our research findings through a joint policy paper and an evidentiary briefing produced together with partners across Europe. Following the passing of the Pact at the end of 2023, we will continue to monitor its implementation in 2024 and push for greater protections of the rights of people on the move at Europe's borders.

Third party interventions to the Council of Europe

In 2023 we engaged with third party interventions to the Council of Europe sharing our evidence on the situation of asylum seekers and refugees in Greece. In collaboration with our partner I Have Rights we undertook a Rule 9 submission to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, reporting on the current state of the asylum system in Greece, 12 years after the landmark 2011 *M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece* ruling by the European Court of Human Rights. The judgement found that the Greek government violated Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights, namely the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment, due to conditions in Greek detention facilities, the living conditions of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors, and the lack of an effective remedy against expulsion due to deficiencies in the asylum procedure.

Our submission concluded that, despite twelve years passing, Greece has yet to fully implement the judgement. Our evidence testified to the continuation of violations within Greece's asylum and reception systems. Evidence submitted by Mobile Info Team and I Have Rights contributed to the Committee's supervision of the case, resulting in a [request for further information](#) issued by the Committee of Ministers, which the Greek government must provide by summer 2024 in order to prove their compliance with the judgement

◆ Events and conferences

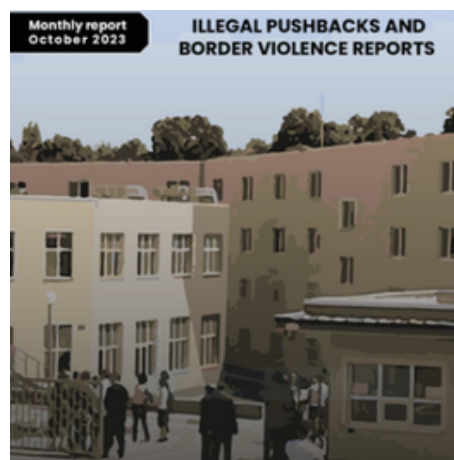
During 2023, we organised and attended events and conferences to share our learnings and expertise, building stronger networks with partners to advocate for people on the move both in Greece and internationally.

- **In March 2023**, we attended a four day conference organised by the Border Violence Monitoring Network, strengthening our partnerships and working with other member organisations to improve the security of the network.
- **In May 2023**, we hosted a webinar entitled [European Regimes of Detention](#), bringing together experts from Greece, Italy, France and Bulgaria to discuss systems of incarceration of people on the move and the challenges of conducting research and advocacy on this topic, drawing on our collaborative research on conditions in pre-removal detention facilities on the Greek mainland.
- **In June 2023**, we attended a conference on detention organised by Equal Rights Beyond Borders on the island of Kos, sharing our expertise on conditions within pre-removal facilities on the mainland with legal actors.
- **In June 2023**, we attended a hybrid UN Day of General Discussion organised by the Subcommittee for the Prevention of Torture, concerning torture prevention in detention, sharing findings from our research on detention in Greece.
- **In October 2023**, we attended a training organised by the Border Violence Monitoring Network on cybersecurity and developing a digital security policy for the network.



Border Violence Monitoring Network

We remain an active member of the Border Violence Monitoring Network, a grassroots collective of organisations documenting testimonies of pushbacks and internal violence which are uploaded to a public, [online database](#). This serves as a basis for our transnational advocacy efforts, which aim to bring evidence of human rights violations at the external borders of Europe to lobby those in positions of power to end the practice of pushbacks and abuses against people on the move. In 2023, we contributed to [monthly reports](#) sharing our knowledge from the ground, monitored press releases on [police operations](#) in Thessaloniki, co-drafted a statement on [far-right violence in Evros](#), and contributed to a UN submission on the [use of technologies in pushback operations](#).



COLLABORATIONS AND TRAININGS

Throughout the year our Senior Caseworker provided online and inperson training to volunteers in other organisations in northern Greece. Our 'Introduction to Asylum in Greece' training provides a digestible overview of Greece's complex asylum system targeted at volunteers. We collaborate on these trainings in order to ensure our partner organisations in northern Greece understand the legal context in which they are working and how to refer community members to appropriate services and support.

2023 we began a collaboration with a consultancy organisation called MAPS to better define our internal operations and decision making processes and ensure our long-term sustainability. This ongoing process includes an assessment of our organisational system, structure, communication processes and the future goals of MIT.



"Introduction to Asylum in Greece" Training delivered by MIT

The collaboration with MAPS will provide crucial professional guidance and support and ensure internal accountability, as well as result in the design and implementation of an intervention to strengthen our governance processes, facilitate a safe space of interaction among our different roles and support the organisation in facing current challenges. By focusing on this, we are aiming to increase the sustainability of MIT as an organisation, ensuring that we can continue to provide reliable information and in-depth assistance for the people that need our services.

In June 2023 our partnership with Refugee.Info came to a close. The partnership, which began in April 2022, aimed to serve the informational needs of people on the move in a more holistic way, expanding the breadth of information provided. The project was facilitated by our team of caseworkers through Refugee.Info's Facebook page. Therefore, as well as our usual WhatsApp and Facebook hotlines, we also responded to questions raised by users of Refugee.Info's Facebook page. From January to June 2023 we answered an additional 900 enquiries directly from our partnership with Refugee.Info.

In August our Coordinator and Senior Caseworker travelled to Athens to strengthen our working relationship and collaborations with organisations in the region. We were able to assess capacities and develop further our referral system as well as strengthening current relationships and establishing new ones. This trip was invaluable to ensure an updated and complete overview of the context and to understand the impact and reach of our services.

During 2023, MIT attended trainings delivered by Stop the Traffik, an organisation campaigning to end trafficking and modern slavery. Our Research Officer and Senior Caseworker attended workshops to better understand how to identify and support survivors of trafficking in the context of our casework.



◆ Contribution to academic research

Information on the move? An experiment on supporting forcibly displaced people in Greece

AUTHORS
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In late 2023 we saw the culmination of a research project carried out by researchers at University College London and Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich in collaboration with MIT and IRC Hellas. The research concerned the effectiveness of information provision on people on the move, a largely underexplored topic, with the findings published in a working paper in early 2024.

The project examined the impact of information provision on people on the move who arrived in Greece before November 2021, comparing the effectiveness of generic versus personalised information provision on outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers, including their knowledge on specific topics and access to support services. The researchers worked with two sample groups accessed through MIT and IRC to compare two modes of information provision, generic information on a webpage (IRC Hellas) and personalised information (as provided by MIT caseworkers over WhatsApp hotlines and Facebook).

The findings highlight the high take-up of generic information as it requires minimal effort from the client, while personalised information provision had a lower take-up rate but higher impact on certain outcomes. In particular, legal information provided in a personalised way was shown to have an impact on clients' knowledge about different types of exploitation and about the support which is available for survivors of violence. The paper highlights the importance of personalised information in which a caseworker is able to provide information which is tailored, and may be either difficult or impossible for clients to find in generic sources. The key findings from the report support greater investment in information provision services by governments and other funders, in particular for projects which provide both static and personalised information to marginalised communities.

CASE STUDY: LEFT WITHOUT PROTECTION

Even if someone has received asylum from a European state, this unfortunately does not always mean that the person is actually able to receive the protection they have been granted. Over the years, MIT has become aware of countless cases of beneficiaries of international protection who are stranded in other countries without the possibility to return to their country of protection, despite them having an undoubted right to return due to their protection status. Reasons for temporarily leaving the country of protection are mostly the strong desire to see or be with family members, who can't be easily reunited. The consequences of being stranded are often severe. In most cases people are deprived of their documents, unable to receive asylum again, as they have already been granted protection in the past, and many end up in homelessness and destitution.

Like for many Syrian families, Mr Ahmad's family (name changed for anonymity) had been scattered by the civil war in his country over all of Europe and the Middle East. While he, his wife and his youngest daughter had managed to escape the war to Germany and received asylum there, some of his adult children were in different countries including Turkey, the Netherlands and Sweden. When one of his adult daughters had a medical emergency in Turkey and urgently needed her parents, Mr Ahmad and his wife didn't hesitate and travelled to Turkey to be with their daughter. Unable to return to Germany after the emergency was resolved, as their residence permits had expired, an odyssey started which took six years of their lives.



Mr. Ahmad made contact with MIT through our hotlines, after managing to come to Greece. He and his family had applied for a visa to re-enter Germany but been rejected, which shattered their chances of returning to their new home country. Instead they were stuck in a camp for asylum seekers, unable to access protection in Greece, as they already had asylum in Germany. Their case was complex and needed the involvement of a Greek lawyer to assist them with their Greek asylum procedure and a German lawyer, as the German authorities had revoked their decision to grant them protection, providing legally very questionable reasons. MIT coordinated the case, which led to the family being able to return to Germany. Back in Germany, their case went to court to fight the revocation, which finally succeeded and made it possible for their asylum status to be reinstated.

Without our efforts to provide Mr Admad's family with lawyers in Greece and Germany and coordination of the case, they would have remained rejected asylum seekers in Greece, staying illegally and without any access to social welfare.

CASE STUDY: REJECTED VULNERABLE FAMILY

The asylum procedure is by definition extremely complex. People fleeing their home countries are mostly unable to provide proof of facing serious harm or persecution in their country of origin, often due to the dangerous situations they escape from. This leaves asylum authorities with the complicated task of assessing the credibility of an applicant's claim. They often rely on the consistency and richness of detail in a person's statements during asylum interviews. However, many asylum seekers struggle to navigate – due to lack of trust towards authorities, vulnerabilities which go unidentified, and a critical lack of information on the functioning and purpose of the asylum procedure. These factors can make it extremely hard or impossible for asylum seekers to explain their reasons for fleeing and to receive a fair decision. Many people end up falling through the cracks due to a lack of holistic legal support, despite having valid and strong claims for international protection.

Peter and Irma (names changed for anonymity) fled from a sub-Saharan African country to Greece with their young children, but their asylum claim was rejected. They were extremely vulnerable but this had not been recognised by the Greek authorities as the family had not received in-depth support during their first application process. After their claim was rejected, the family were in crisis - facing eviction and potential homelessness, and with deteriorating mental health. Irma struggled severely with the prospect of her children having to sleep rough. She attempted suicide, but survived.

MIT was able to gain the trust of the family, by continuously supporting them and being there for them over a long stretch of time. This enabled Peter and Irma to open up towards our caseworker and disclose crucial details regarding why they had to flee their country of origin, which they had not stated during their first asylum procedure. MIT supported them by establishing their vulnerability with reports, made it possible that they could stay in their accommodation and helped them to apply for a new asylum application. MIT's lawyer accompanied them to their asylum interviews.

Through MIT's intervention the family's vulnerability was finally accepted and with a lot of preparation and support Peter and Irma were finally able to provide all reasons why they are in need of protection to the asylum authorities. Due to the special nature of the case, the family was referred to the relocation programme and the French authorities subsequently transferred them to France. The family are now in France, having received asylum status there and are able to move forward with their lives in a protected and safe environment.



SUPPORT MIT

We wouldn't be able to do the work that we do without the support of both our individual and organisational donors, from regular monthly donations, one-off contributions, and grants from foundations and other humanitarian organisations. Thank you to everyone who enabled us to provide information and assistance to thousands of people on the move in 2023.



DONATE

With your support we can help even more people on the move in Greece, providing vital information and legal assistance. Every donation is appreciated and any amount, big or small, can make a huge difference to someone's life. Go to mobileinfoteam.org/donate

Stay Up to Date



On **Facebook**, we provide frequent information updates aimed at people on the move.



On our **website** you'll find a general overview of our activities, reports and contact details for organisational questions, and our digital hotlines available to people on the move.



On **LinkedIn**, you can connect with us if you're looking to join the team.



On **Twitter** and **Instagram** we engage with news, advocacy and humanitarian support, as well as providing project updates.



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Hotlines for people on the move

contact@mobileinfoteam.org

