



## JOINT STATEMENT

2 October 2020

### **Unique pro bono collaboration tackling refugee crisis wins two awards for legal innovation**

LONDON: An ambitious pro bono project, the Greece Pro Bono Collaborative (GPBC), which provides crucial assistance to asylum seekers in refugee camps in the Greek Islands has been announced as the winner of the Innovation in Social Responsibility award in the Financial Times Innovative Lawyers Awards Europe.

The project was also awarded the CSR Innovation (Multi-Firm) award in Legal Week's Legal Innovation Awards.

The project is a joint effort between six firms – Allen & Overy; Ashurst; Charles Russell Speechlys; Dentons; Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe and White & Case – and the NGO European Lawyers in Lesvos (ELIL). Refugee Legal Support (RLS) was also an NGO partner in the project's first year. At its core, the GPBC aims to provide urgent legal support and advice to vulnerable individuals, with volunteers focusing on preparations for first instance asylum interviews and working on family reunification applications. It helps individuals of all ages, genders and nationalities.

“The incredible need in Greece had been clear to us for some time, but developing a project that could really meaningfully utilise the capacity of international law firm lawyers, and scaling impact through collaboration within the sector, took careful planning” said Amy Grunske, Head of International Pro Bono at Orrick. A comprehensive project infrastructure was developed, with necessary training, supervision and support provided to the firm volunteers by the expert lawyers at ELIL. Implemented in a truly collaborative way, each firm provided volunteer lawyers for two-week placements in Greece in person, before switching to remote secondments in light of Covid-19.

The project has provided ELIL with 50 volunteers to date, advising an estimated 1,400 asylum seekers. Those who received advice from lawyers through ELIL had an approximately 30 percent greater chance of gaining international protection, proving that the project not only provides vital legal assistance, but has also allowed

numerous refugees to secure asylum and avoid to countries where they would face the possibility of persecution and potential harm. “We are proud of how many vulnerable individuals we have been able to help over the last 14 months, and appreciate the project being recognised by both awards; it’s a true testament to the effort, united mind-set, and resourcefulness of everyone involved,” said Helen Rogers, Senior Pro Bono Manager at A&O.

Commenting on the work undertaken, Philip Worthington, Managing Director of ELIL, said: “Despite the challenges that this type of project presents – from working in a completely different area of law, to handling situations with really vulnerable clients in an unpredictable environment – we have been overwhelmed by the level of commitment and interest from lawyers to volunteer their legal skills. More lawyers from the Collaborative Project firms applied than could be accepted. Their determination to make a meaningful difference is what has made this project successful so far – and we expect the need for it will remain for a long time to come.”

In early September, a devastating fire destroyed the whole of Moria refugee camp on Lesbos, leaving its 13,000 occupants homeless and without access to food, water, medical supplies and sanitation. Most have now been moved to a new camp, where lawyers are yet to be granted access. In Samos, the camp has seen confirmed cases of Covid-19 and remains under lockdown with no access for lawyers. The project partners are concerned about what might lie ahead for these vulnerable individuals and remain committed to providing support and assistance.

For further information on the project please contact Helen Rogers at [Helen.Rogers@AllenOvery.com](mailto:Helen.Rogers@AllenOvery.com), or Leah Dudley at [Leah.Dudley@AllenOvery.com](mailto:Leah.Dudley@AllenOvery.com).

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