

Interview: Meet Maria, EASO Field Support Officer



Can you present yourself and explain your role and tasks as a Field Support Officer on the island of Lesbos in Greece?

My name is Maria Zoumidi and, before working for EASO I worked in the humanitarian sector since 2015, when persons fleeing from conflict and war massively arrived on the Greek border islands. My first role was that of the Reception Officer and Team Leader with the purpose of assisting the Greek authorities in the site management on the island of Chios. I joined EASO's operations in Greece on the island of Lesbos three months after the catastrophic fire in Moria as Field Support Officer.

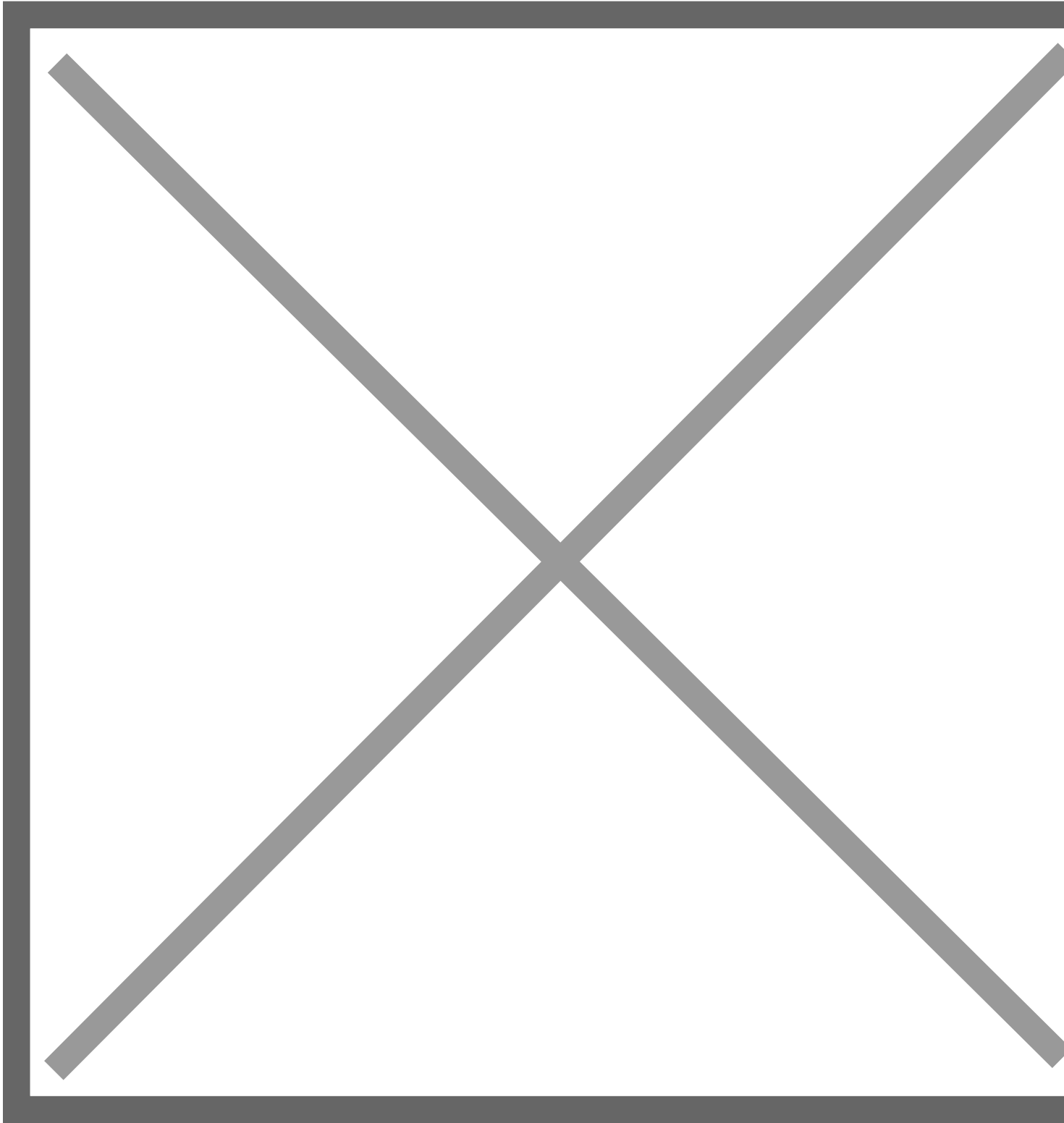
"I feel honoured to work with the EASO team on Lesbos, a team that has been supporting me since day one for the fulfilment of my duties and has eased this journey for me."

What made you want to join EASO? How did you get into working with refugees/asylum seekers?

Providing assistance to persons in need is a value with which I grew up. During my early years of childhood and adolescence, I accompanied my father, who has been voluntarily supporting displaced persons during their challenging journey to safety. Therefore, the so-called "refugee crisis" half a decade ago impelled me to start providing my services to people in need. Taking into consideration the skills that I have gained through my previous deployments in the field, I decided to join EASO's Reception Operation in Greece. **I am very happy that I am part of EASO's team in Lesbos, a team that never ceases to inspire me.** During my deployment, I am given the opportunity to work on supporting developments in the reception conditions, a task which is very rewarding, although also emotionally challenging.

Working in the field and dealing with COVID-19 nowadays means following all sanitary instructions and guidelines. How did this affect your role?

The precautionary measures of sanitation, social distancing and maintenance of good hygienic conditions are hard to keep in sites that accommodate many people. COVID-19 has brought multiple challenges to our everyday reality and has affected the lives of the persons we support, as the Reception and Identification Centres have been under sanitary measures for many months. **Despite all the difficulties, there is good cooperation and communication between the authorities and the residents in the site.** This communication is important as it means that people follow the precautionary measures and respect the relevant sanitary requirements to the extent that this is possible.



What did you gain on a personal level from your work?

Working with EASO has not only helped me to grow as a professional but as a person as well. Having spent 5 years working in different positions on the island of Chios, my new role has given me the opportunity to gain a more holistic view and, subsequently, personal and professional approach on the reception operations. During my deployment, I feel empowered and inspired to deepen my knowledge and master my existing skills, in order to assist in the most efficient way both applicants for international protection as well as the authorities.

What is one of the strongest memories that you had while working for EASO?

The strongest memory that I have acquired during my deployment with EASO is my first day in the new reception site in Lesbos accommodating thousands of residents after the Moria fire. I realized I had to work in a complex emergency context with tremendous challenges.

Is there anything that you would like to add?

I want to thank all the EASO colleagues for their hard work, dedication and professionalism. **I feel honoured to work with the EASO team on Lesbos, a team that has been supporting me since day one for the fulfilment of my duties and has eased this journey for me.**

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