

Interview 1

Personal Information and Living Conditions

Name: Musa

Age: 29

Family Status: Single

Status: Subsequent application, awaiting decision at second instance

Could you introduce yourself?

I am Musa, and I am a single man. I arrived in Greece with my younger brother.

Where have you lived in Greece?

I arrived in Farmakonisi, which is an uninhabited island with a military base. I only stayed there for one night. Then the coastguard moved us to Leros. We were taken to the hotspot in Leros, where I spent two months in the open camp, and where I first claimed asylum.

In January 2020, I went from Leros to Athens, where I stayed with a friend until August 2020. From there I went to Santorini, where I tried to fly to Switzerland. In Santorini, I was arrested in August 2020, and detained in a police station – I don't remember which one. After a few days I was transferred to Kos. I spent a few hours in the police station, and then I was brought here to detention. I have been here since then.

First-Instance Procedure

When did you arrive in Greece?

In October 2019

What did you understand about the asylum procedure at this time?

When we arrived in Leros, they put us in a closed place, it was nearly like a jail. Then they brought interpreters for different languages, they brought an interpreter for every single refugee. And they told us: "You need to submit an application, and if you don't want to, you're going to go back". We were treated really badly by the police and the people working there. We didn't understand each other at all because of the language barrier, and once we arrived, they took everything from us – the passports, the money, everything. And they didn't really let the other people who arrived before us speak with us.

Actually, we didn't have enough information at all, any at all. They didn't tell us what our rights were, what we were supposed to do, what was next, we didn't have any information. The only thing they did was fingerprinting us and giving us the police papers, and they didn't ask whether anyone had a medical problem, if they needed any type of care. They only cared about fingerprinting us and making us submit the applications. After they fingerprinted us, they gave us a blanket and they told us to leave. There wasn't enough space, so we left the hotspot. It was raining, it was a really bad situation. We took the blankets and we found old houses around

the hotspot, and we stayed in an old abandoned house to protect ourselves from the rain. Other people had small tents but, because of the rain, they couldn't stay inside. Me and my younger brother were staying in the abandoned house. Actually, not only me and my younger brother, we also found a pregnant woman on the island, who had arrived with her husband, but then they arrested her husband and they let her free. She had no idea where her husband was, so she came to stay with us in the old house, and we cleaned it together. There was no electricity, no toilet. It was really cold. No doors, no windows. We stayed like that for two and a half months.

We were trying to go and submit an asylum application and they told us: "You should make an appointment to do that". Because there were a lot of people trying to submit an application, it took a long time to get an appointment. The hotspot was really crowded, there were like 30 containers, and there were thousands of people. There wasn't enough space, it was like there were three times the number of people who could stay in the containers. They even came and kicked us out of the old house we were staying in, and said it didn't belong to the hotspot, so we should go back, even though there wasn't enough space for us to stay there, but they didn't really leave us alone.

Even in the hotspot, when it started to rain, it would flood with water inside the containers. How are people supposed to live there with the dirty water coming in? Thank God I wasn't living there: even if it was an old and abandoned house, it was still better than staying in the hotspot. We suffered a lot on the island. My younger brother and I ended up living in a small tent outside the hotspot. Finally, we thought: "That's it, we should leave. They don't offer us anything here. We couldn't get an appointment with the doctor or any medication, they're not helping us submit a refugee claim". We decided that it was it.

Did you seek legal advice at this stage?

I had no access to any legal service. You should know that, in Leros, the asylum service and other organisations are separated from the hotspot itself. If you went there and you asked for something, they wouldn't let you in if you didn't have an appointment. I didn't have a private lawyer or anyone to help me. No one told us where to find legal advice. I didn't know how to get a lawyer. We didn't have access. I don't speak English and, when I arrived, I knew no one, I wasn't able to find legal services. Even with the UN, if you want to talk to them, there is a huge number of refugees and few people working there, so whenever you go they will say: "Come tomorrow, tomorrow".

I didn't have an interview or anything in Leros. Just when I arrived there, they fingerprinted me, and after that they took our documents and passports, and they gave us the police papers, that's it. In Kos, I tried to seek legal advice, but you know the situation, the problem is that you're in detention and the organisations, the people who are responsible for this, are not really regularly coming in, it's really hard to get access to them. Even if you go to the asylum service they won't really help you. Even if you have a serious medical problem you will suffer till death until they allow you to go.

Did anyone else advise you regarding the asylum procedure at this stage?

It was only other Syrians, and they were telling me: "There's no point in staying here, it'll take a really long time to finish your procedure". Some were staying for 6 months, some for a year. They told me to get out. They told me it doesn't matter how long you stay, most of the time you'll be rejected.

I was also searching for some information on the internet, but it's completely different on the ground, the actual

things they're doing, the procedure they're making. For instance, when I looked into the internet, they said: "You can contact the UN, or other organisations by email", and I already did, but they never replied. All the things they show on social media and on the internet are completely different from the ones in the field. For instance, about my medical situation, when I was in the hotspot they didn't really let me receive any medical service. For instance, when I tried to ask for medical help, I was asking the people in front of the asylum service (the guards or something, I couldn't actually get into the asylum service) and they asked me what documents I had; I said I had a police paper. They said: "Arrange your first interview or we can't take you to the doctor or get medication". And I said: "Okay, get me an appointment for the interview", and they said: "It's not our business, it's the asylum service". Wherever you go, they send you somewhere else.

I tried to arrange an interview in Athens. It was by Skype, they gave us a number to do that and we were calling on the day for Arabic speakers, and no one really picked up the phone. My other friends tried as well. They give you a number but it's never really working. Also, I went to the Asylum Service in Athens and I tried to talk with them. They gave me a paper saying I should make an appointment on Skype. I didn't have an interview until I got to Kos, where I had four interviews – registration, second interview, another registration interview, then another second interview. Because I submitted an application twice.

How did you feel prior to your interview?

It took three months after arriving in Kos before they arranged the first registration interview for me. I tried many times to ask for an appointment and no one contacted me. And one day I went to the doctor, and from the doctor I passed through the asylum service and tried to talk with them. And one rude worker came and talked to me in a really rude way, like: "Why are you asking to submit an application? We are the ones who are going to call you, you can't ask for an appointment, you should go back to detention and wait for us". He was really rude.

Then I had my first registration interview and it was a really bad interview. The interviewer was making fun of our story and of us, he was a really rude person. Then, my first substantive interview was in November 2020. Actually, I didn't really feel like a human being before the interview, I was thinking about the interviewer from the registration interview who was a really bad person, so I was wondering how it was going to be during the second one. I wasn't feeling good about it because of the interviewer during the interview and because I have psychological problems. I was in a really bad situation, I was really depressed during the interview.

What were your impressions of the interviewer or the interpreter?

The interviewer was normal, she was normal. But the way that they conduct the interview, they only ask about Turkey, and if Turkey is a safe country for you. The way they're asking you, you feel like you're going to be rejected. You don't feel safe. You know that you're going to be rejected. I'm Syrian and I'm supposed to be asked about Syrian conditions, not Turkey, I'm not Turkish. And everyone knows that Syria is in a war, so it's unfair to ask me about a country that's not mine, not the country that I came from. And you should ask me also about my involvement in the army, and things happening in my life in Syria.

I understood the interpreter, we had a good understanding. He was Arabic, he wasn't from my hometown but we could understand each other. I don't really understand English or Greek so I can't tell if he interpreted correctly or not. They told me that the interpreter would write down information on the paper, and during the interview there were some things they didn't know, and I noticed that they missed some points when they were translating. They were looking up lots of words, which makes me feel like they missed some things.

Do you think you said everything you wanted to say during your interview?

Not really, I didn't say the things I wanted. I just replied to their questions.

How did you feel following the interview?

I just had the feeling that I'm supposed to talk about my country during the interview, not about other things, and that I should tell them about the suffering that I've been through in my country. I'm a Syrian and I escaped from the military service, the refugee claim I have is a political one. And no one asked me what type of refugee claim you want to submit or anything, the only thing they cared about was the period I spent in Turkey.

After I finished the interview they said: "Do you want to add something?" I wanted to add a lot of things, my whole life in Syria, but it's not about adding, it's the whole point of the interview. The whole interview was about Turkey and what happened in Turkey. I'm not Turkish. I thought there was no point mentioning anything at the end, if they wanted to ask about my country then they probably would have asked me from the beginning, they were only interested in Turkey and my life there, nothing about Syria. I felt really bad during the interview. I had psychological problems and big depression during that time.

Second-Instance Procedure

What were your thoughts when you received your first instance rejection?

I don't really remember. In the beginning, I already knew I'd be rejected. I was happy that I was rejected, because I thought that after the second rejection they'd give me an expulsion paper and I would be able to travel and go to the country where my mother lives. All the Syrians here in general get rejected, and I'm one of them. Because I've met all the Syrians inside detention, we communicate with each other and everyone knows everyone's stories, so we knew it. Most Syrians get rejected, except in 2021: right now there are some people who got accepted and they're Syrians, but it's so, so rare.

Did anyone explain why you were rejected?

No, never. We Syrians know that after they changed the Greek government here, this government claims that Turkey is a safe country for Syrians even if it's not. Everyone who is Syrian knows this. I don't know exactly when this happened, but I think it was in 2019. Before August 2019, Syrians had priority to be accepted as refugees, after that they started to reject them.

Was the possibility and modality of submitting an appeal made clear to you? Did you try to find a lawyer after your first rejection?

I didn't really know how to submit an appeal, but my friends in detention knew how to do it and helped me to do it. No one else explained. I tried to find a lawyer when I got into detention, but other people inside told me that the lawyers can't do anything about the situation. One of my friends outside Kos tried to talk with a lawyer, but when he explained to the lawyer that I'm inside detention in Kos, he said there's nothing he can help me with. So I did the appeal myself.

How did you feel at this time?

I submitted the appeal and I knew they'd send the second rejection right away. It was something like a routine, you know you should do it but you also already know what the result will be. So, when I submitted the appeal, I was hoping I would get expulsion papers and leave Kos. I met some people who didn't submit their appeals and didn't get expulsion papers and they kept them inside detention for a year and a half. If I knew they wouldn't give me expulsion papers after doing the appeal, I'd rather not have done it. I'm spending the same time in detention anyway, so what's the point of doing it? Actually, when I arrived here my friends told me that I shouldn't submit an application for asylum because I was going to be rejected anyway and that it was better not to be fingerprinted in Greece and to go to another country where the procedure is much better. But at that point I was already fingerprinted.

Did anyone explain why you were rejected for the second time? How did you feel at that time?

I got my second rejection in February 2021. No one explained why, they only gave me the rejection and they informed me that I only had 30 days to submit an appeal with a lawyer. Actually, they don't really explain and we don't really need their explanation, because we already know that we are going to be rejected and no one really knows why, but no one explains either. Actually, there are no exceptions with the procedures, they don't really care if you're really sick and need medication or if you're a political refugee, the only thing that they say and that they care about is whether Turkey is a safe country for Syrians and they don't really look at the issues and the case. So, first when I decided to submit an application for a refugee claim, my friends in detention were like: "There's no point in doing it". And I said: "Maybe I'm a special case, I have medical problems, I've been injured, I've escaped from the army service, so I'll probably have some priority". Eventually I found out that they were right and I was wrong.

When I received my rejection documents, they were in Greek. The last page was in Arabic, saying: "If you submit an appeal, you'll get a card". I don't know what they mean by card. They wrote it down in the first rejection and the second one, and until today I have no idea what card they're talking about. The second rejection was very similar to the first rejection. No one explained anything. The interpreter told me that I got the rejection, like the first time, and gave me the document, and that's it.

Did anyone explain your options at this point? What were your plans after receiving your second rejection?

No one said anything, except when I got the first rejection and they said that I had 10 days to submit an appeal. For the second rejection, they gave me the documents and they said that I had 30 days to submit an appeal through a lawyer. I already asked friends from inside and outside detention about the possibilities and what I should do. After I found out that there's nothing really to do, I didn't want to submit an appeal, it would have been useless, I would have spent the same time in detention anyway. If I get a lawyer and give him a legal authorization, he will need money. Most of the people I know paid money and the lawyers didn't really help. Most of the lawyers are not allowed inside detention anyway. We already tried to talk to the UN and send them emails, but they took a really long time to respond to me.

Subsequent Application

When did you make your subsequent application?

So, one of my friends talked to the UN and they told him: "You will have better opportunities if you open your file again, if you have extra things to add to your case that will be helpful to you". Actually, I had a little bit of hope that they would change their mind about my case and if they didn't change their mind, they would give me expulsion papers. So, when I submitted the first application, I didn't have my documents that proved that I escaped from joining the army, but when I was thinking about the submission of the second application, I had it here: my brother in Turkey sent me some clothes and he put this document inside the clothes for me. So I said: "Okay, let's do it". I gave them the military booklet and I thought: "Even if I don't get accepted, maybe I'll get expulsion papers". So a week after I got the second rejection, I submitted the second application myself.

Did you seek legal advice for this application?

I asked the UN for a lawyer after my second rejection, for the second appeal. I emailed them right when I got the second rejection, the same day or in the next few days. I was waiting for the UN, they told me they were going to look for a lawyer for me, and that they would help me with that. But they came after 26 days, there were 4 days left and they said: "Because you are late to submit the second rejection, the lawyer can't really help because you don't have enough time" And she proposed to me to apply for a second time. I told her: "I already applied for the second application myself" and she was really surprised, she didn't know about it. I submitted the new application a week after I received the second rejection documents.

I tried to talk with her and she told me: "In your second application, if you have any proof you're going to add or anything that will make it stronger, you will be accepted as a refugee". And she mentioned that Greece insists that Turkey is a safe country for Syrians, so she suggested that I try to prove to them that Turkey is not a safe country for me. I didn't really ask for a lawyer for the subsequent application, and they didn't say anything about it.

How was your interview?

Before the interview, I was hoping that I'd be accepted. After I talked to the UN, they gave me some hope. I added some documents and I managed to remember a lot of bad things that happened to me in Turkey. But during the interview the only questions they were asking me were about Turkey, so I was really disappointed. I tried to talk about my condition in Syria and what my life was like there, but during the interview, most of the time they asked me about Turkey. I tried to explain about Syria but they get you into a circle that is only about Turkey, and they put you in a corner that you can't really describe what you want about your life in Syria. When I realised, I knew that I would be rejected. I knew I'd be rejected after it, but I was hoping I'd get an expulsion paper with the rejection.

Did you seek legal advice after getting your rejection?

When I got the rejection, I had already prepared the appeal and I gave it immediately to them. I told them that they didn't need to explain to me more about why I was rejected. I told them that I had left the case number empty and asked them to put the new case number in. And they told me when they would open my file again, and which committee would be responsible for it. I didn't have the hope that someone was going to contact me

and say: “I am your lawyer and I am going to help you”. I had no hope that someone would help me. I already sent emails to the UN, but nothing was really working for me until you contacted me and you tried to help me.

Perspective on Admissibility Procedure for Syrians

Do you understand why Turkey is deemed a safe country for Syrians? What are your thoughts on this?

I’m going to reply with a question as well: so why didn’t they consider Turkey a safe country before 2019? And what changed after 2019 to make Turkey a safe country for Syrians? I think it’s a political issue. We don’t know what it is exactly. But Greece and Turkey have some fights between them and they try to push each other with their refugee problems. So we are in the middle, between these two countries that are fighting because of the refugee problem. It’s a political thing. And it’s not only me that thinks this way, most of the people that I know in detention think it’s political.

And actually it’s not about being safe inside the country. There’s no war inside Turkey, as we all know. The point is about the documents and identification proof. They don’t afford anything for Syrians. If I want to study or work, I can’t without these things. That’s only one of the reasons. You know how the Turkish people treat Syrians, how racist against Syrians they are, how they use violence with different people. These are just some of the reasons why Turkey is unsafe for Syrians, but there are many more. So, during my interview I already explained something personal that happened when I was in Turkey and I explained everything about how I was insulted and beaten and everything, but they didn’t really care about it. So I don’t know how they determine the criteria about whether something bad happened to me.

Are you aware that the asylum procedure for Syrians in Greece differs for those who arrive on the mainland and those who arrive on the islands? Or that the asylum procedure is different for different nationalities on the island?

Yeah, actually I realized it after I moved to the mainland. Once I reached Athens I already knew that there’s a different kind of procedure if you’re on the island or the mainland. I don’t know the details, but I know that if you’re on the mainland and they find you, they won’t get you to detention, they will give you documents and let you free. But if you are found on an island, you’re going to be in detention, and it’s harder, and you’re not allowed to go outside from the island, it’s complicated. We learned these things really late.

I get that the procedure is different, but even if I were in the mainland, it takes ages to get accepted, a couple of years, so what is the point in wasting all these years for an asylum claim? I was there and I saw the conditions in the mainland. I didn’t submit anything there. They only took my fingerprints, I didn’t go through procedures, but I knew what it was like to apply in the mainland. When I was in Athens, I tried to talk to a private lawyer and explain about my situation, and they said: “There’s nothing really we can do for you, except when you get the Skype interview and then we can be with you during the interview”. I tried to book an interview many times but it wasn’t working. They’re only open at specific times and days and there are a lot of people.

I also know that the procedure is different between nationalities. The guys from Pakistan, they’re different from us, they can request that they want to go back to their countries, they can do that. But Syrians can’t go back to their country. What’s the point with having different procedures for different countries? There is no way for Syrians to get accepted as refugees.

What do you want people to know about the situation for Syrians on the islands?

The only thing that I want to add is if you can please send the tragic message about the conditions and the detention and how we're really suffering. No one is supposed to be detained only for being a refugee, only because he came, really that's not fair. No one should be detained because he got inside a country illegally. We're not killers and it's so beyond us to do these things with people who are seeking safety and a better future and nothing else.

Interview 2

Personal Information and Living Conditions

Name: Ahmed

Age: 38

Family Status: Single

Status: rejected at second instance, waiting for the submission of an annulment

Could you introduce yourself?

I am Ahmed, and I am a single man. I arrived in Greece alone.

Do you have any medical conditions or disabilities?

Yes, I have several medical problems: first I have to do some surgery, I have some problems with my stomach, and I have psychological problems.

Have you ever experienced any forms of serious violence?

In Syria I was in prison for a week and in Turkey I was in prison for two days, and then they sent me back to Syria. I experienced serious violence in prison during all this time. In Greece, I have also experienced psychological violence from the situation in the camp and from the police. Every time I was outside of the camp of Vial, the police called me "Ali Baba" and I experienced violence once when I went out to go shopping in the city, and the police stopped me and interrogated me aggressively for two hours in the street because I didn't have the certificate to move. Once, in Vial there was a big fire, and the police came and took a lot of people who had nothing to do with the fire. Athens is not very different from the island, it's the same. I learnt how to be careful and to not meet the police, but a lot of people have troubles with the police. All the people that got a rejection are on the streets because they can't stay in the camp and RIS is not responsible for them so they can just stay in the street.

Where have you lived in Greece?

I was first in Chios for over one year, and I lived in Vial, in a tent with three other people, and then last month I left for Athens.

First-Instance Procedure

When did you arrive in Greece?

In December 2019

What did you understand about the asylum procedure at this time?

I had very basic information about any asylum system: you go, you stay in some camps, you start your procedure and then you get your decision. I was surprised about the situation I found, these camps are for animals not for people.

Did you seek legal advice at this stage?

I couldn't reach any lawyers for the first six months. I needed to stay several nights at the info point queueing to try to get a lawyer. At last, I didn't get the lawyer through the info point, but through the UNHCR that referred my case to you. If I knew from the beginning about the chance to have a lawyer, it would have been better, because in Vial we had to fight for everything, including getting a lawyer. I should have had a lawyer from the very beginning.

Did anyone else advise you regarding the asylum procedure at this stage?

I didn't ask and I didn't get any information from anybody else other than the lawyer. The procedure also changed, so we didn't know which law applied to whom. You never know how it works. I tried to look for some information on the internet, but then I found you and so I just asked you.

How did you feel prior to your interview?

I was terrified: inside the room I thought I was under investigation, not an asylum seeker. I didn't take my psychological medication for the three days before the interview, so that I could concentrate and say everything, but it was terrifying.

What were your impressions of the interviewer or the interpreter?

I didn't feel comfortable. The interviewer made me feel like I was under investigation, that I was watched, not safe. He asked me short questions, watching me not in a nice way. The interpreter wasn't good, because when I saw the transcript, I saw a mistake. When I told him about a friend who was living in Turkey, the interpreter translated that he was my cousin. But it wasn't true, it's a friend.

How did you feel about the questions you were asked?

They were trying to make me doubt myself about where I was from, and they were asking questions about the place I was from, showing me the map and asking me about cities next to mine. They made me feel uncomfortable.

Do you think you said everything you wanted to say during your interview?

No, I didn't say everything. Every time I tried to explain something, the interpreter asked me the next question. For example I couldn't say anything about Syria and about the Turkish police, I couldn't explain what happened.

How did you feel following the interview?

For sure, there is no good feeling after the interview, because it's useless. Due to my psychological situation I knew someone at RIS and they told me that I arrived at the wrong time, because before someone would have read my file, but no one was recognising Syrians now.

Second-Instance Procedure

What were your thoughts when you received your first instance rejection?

I received the rejection in December 2020, one year after my arrival. I thought I would have been accepted, I mean, it's Syria. But it was a rejection.

Did anyone explain why you were rejected?

When I was given the decision I asked in Vial why Turkey was safe and they just told me that I arrived at the wrong time and that now Turkey is considered safe.

Was the possibility and modality of submitting an appeal made clear to you?

Yes, it was something obligatory to do in order to take back the *Khartia*. I then discussed it with you and I understood it was important to appeal but I didn't understand why I got a rejection in the first place.

How did you feel at this time?

It's absurd, there are a lot of absurd things in this procedure and we're at the point of waiting for the deportation instead of staying in Greece. It's absurd that we came as asylum seekers, and now we're hoping for deportation. Everyone knows that Greece doesn't respect the law, and also the people who were working in Vial knew it.

Perspective on Admissibility Procedure for Syrians

Do you understand why Turkey is deemed a safe country for Syrians? What are your thoughts on this?

Once I passed the border to Turkey and I got hurt, they brought me to the hospital and then they took me to jail. I don't understand how Turkey can be considered safe. I also got a 5-year entry ban, so I can't enter Turkey. And Turkish people are racist towards Syrians. It's not safe for me. In Turkey, sometimes, the police just attack Syrian shops. Three Syrian workers get the salary of one Turkish worker, and a lot of Syrians are used by the Turkish military as foreign fighters. It's a political fight, and now the relationship between Turkey, Greece and the EU is clear: when they want something, they just use the "Syrian card". Erdogan is clearly using the "Syrian card". How is such a country considered safe for anyone?

Are you aware that the asylum procedure for Syrians in Greece differs for those who arrive on the mainland and those who arrive on the islands? Or that the asylum procedure is different for different nationalities on the island?

After I arrived in Greece, I discovered this information. And yes, on the islands everybody gets asylum but not the Syrians. It seems like Syrians are the devil of the planet.

How do you feel about your current situation?

I had to leave Syria and I knew I couldn't stay in Turkey and I thought Europe was the land of rights and freedom. But I was shocked when I discovered it was like this. I wish I had died in an explosion in Syria instead of being here. I came to Greece by the sea and to take the boat, you have to be crazy or hopeless and want to search for a new life, but this is not the case here.

What do you want people to know about the situation for Syrians on the islands?

We just seek a good life and understanding from the people. We came from a burnt country, otherwise we would have never left it. Please understand.

Interview 3

Personal Information and Living Conditions

Name: Nabil

Age: 38

Family Status: Married

Status: rejected at first instance

Could you introduce yourself?

I am Nabil, I'm from Syria, I'm married and I have four children. I'm in Greece alone.

Where have you lived in Greece?

I live in the detention center in Kos.

First-Instance Procedure

When did you arrive in Greece?

I arrived in Greece in February 2020. This was the first time I attempted to come to Greece. I arrived in Kos. We arrived on the island, and once we landed, we were walking, then the police cars came and they took us in the car and they sent us to the hotspot. They talked to us a little bit, and then they fingerprinted us and put us, around 33 people, inside one caravan for three days outside detention, and then took us into detention. They took me straight to detention, never to the open hotspot.

What did you understand about the asylum procedure at this time?

Nothing. I didn't have the intention to apply for asylum before I came to Greece. I was planning to go to other European countries, like France or Germany, I have some relatives there. But the special police forced me to apply for asylum here. When we went to the asylum service, we were handcuffed.

Did you seek legal advice at this stage?

No. The time we arrived here, they put us in detention and no one explained anything to us. No one could understand what was really happening. We didn't really want to submit an application. They said: "If you don't want to, then you will stay for 18 months inside detention".

Did anyone else advise you regarding the asylum procedure at this stage?

The people inside detention told me that it's better to apply for asylum, because of the new rules, whoever doesn't submit an asylum application stays in detention for 18 months. And I didn't want to stay in detention for a year and a half because I have my wife and children in Syria. And then I got my first rejection.

How did you feel prior to your interview?

My interview was ten days after the registration interview. Imagine someone inside detention, how he would be feeling: that is how I felt. On the day of my interview, the police car came, and the police officer handcuffed me and put me inside the car, and they transferred me to the asylum service to have the interview. They opened the car, they let me out. They took the handcuffs, they released me. I felt like a criminal. Like a serial killer or something. Everyone in the open camp was looking at me like a criminal, not a refugee.

What were your impressions of the interviewer or the interpreter?

The interviewers were okay, they were asking the questions, writing the things I was saying. I understood the interpreter, he was translating the things I was saying. I asked him things, but he never replied. I think they do it on purpose, to not make us understand what's going on. I was asking generally about the Syrians' conditions here and for how long I would be staying in detention, about what would happen after spending 18 months in detention, and to get more details about our conditions.

How did you feel about the questions you were asked?

It was something really funny. They were treating me as a Turkish guy. All the questions were about Turkey, like: "Why you didn't stay in Turkey?" And I was like: "In Turkey they already deported me back to Syria three times", which they knew, but they kept asking me about Turkey. I felt like the questions were like a routine, like it's already written, it's not about my case itself, just a system on the computer, they ask the same things to all Syrians. They were asking me: "Why you didn't apply for asylum in Turkey and why is Turkey not a safe country for you?", and I was trying to explain everything, like how many times they already found me and my wife and children trying to cross the borders and already took me back to Syria and they already knew it. And they said: "Give us one reason why Turkey isn't safe for you", and I already explained about it, but they just kept going about it in this way. The interview did not take that long, as I mentioned before. The translation took a

while, but if the interviewer had spoken Arabic, then we could have done it in ten minutes and it would be done. They didn't ask me anything about Syria and my condition there. They only insisted on talking about Turkey: "Why didn't you stay there? Why didn't you apply for asylum there?" And for one second I felt I'm Turkish.

Do you think you said everything you wanted to say during your interview?

I had the intention to talk about Syria and my condition there. Because I have three children and my wife is pregnant, we were trying to live a safe life. But they didn't really want to hear that, the only thing they talked about was Turkey. Even when I started to mention anything about my condition in Syria, they would go back to the same point on how I crossed the borders to Turkey and how my life in Turkey was, in the period I was staying there.

How did you feel following the interview?

I was quite new to these procedures and these things. The only thing I was caring about was getting out of detention.

Second-Instance Procedure

What were your thoughts when you received your first instance rejection?

I was really shocked because the conditions in Syria are really bad. The war is still going on. And after all this, I got rejected.

Did anyone explain why you were rejected?

I went to the asylum office. The guy at the asylum service was really rude to me. He said: "You got your first rejection, either you submit an appeal or we'll take you back to Turkey". And I was like: "Please take me back to Turkey, I don't want to spend 18 months inside detention". And he said: "Within 10 days I can put you in something and take you back to Turkey". He was really rude and threw the documents in my face. No one explained why I got rejected, he only mentioned that if I don't submit an appeal, they'll take me back to Turkey, and I was like: "Please do it". And he was threatening me somehow, either you submit the appeal or you're going to...I was like: "If I submit the appeal, I'll get a second rejection, and then what will happen?" And they said: "Stay 18 months in detention or we'll take you back to Turkey". I said that I'd prefer to go back than be detained for a year and a half. During that period, I started to understand what was going on. Most of the Syrians – there were about 40 of us inside detention – got rejections. Consider hypothetically that I am lying on my case, and another is lying on his case, surely there was someone amongst the 40 who is telling the truth, no? But it's the same procedure for all of us, we get the same process, we all get rejections.

Was the possibility and modality of submitting an appeal made clear to you?

Not really, I didn't have enough information, the same office that gave me the rejection document was just giving us an empty white paper and said like: "Write your reasons". We knew it wouldn't make any difference. At that time I didn't see any lawyer, now there are some lawyers referred to me by the UN and they are helping, but then I didn't see any lawyer.

How did you feel after not being told the reasons for your rejection?

I didn't submit any appeal. Because I knew I'd get the second rejection and I didn't think there was any point submitting the appeal, and if you want to take me back to Turkey then do it. And they started to make fun of me, the people who work inside the asylum service. Their questions don't make much sense, I'm not Turkish.

I stayed for one year inside detention, and no one talked with me during all this period, until I found a website for the UN for someone seeking help and I tried to talk with them, then two people there came and talked with me. They asked why I didn't submit an appeal, I said there's no point submitting one. They said that the solution for my case is to do a new application or follow up the old one. So, the UN told me they're going to send me a lawyer to help me with this, and we had a meeting for 4 hours about this, and I told her everything. The lawyer was looking at my documents and laughing. I asked why. She said she was not laughing at me, but at the documents. It says that if you get rejected within three months, you should be taken back to your country, not to Turkey. It doesn't really make sense, it's copied and pasted, it's not real what they're saying. Most of the Syrians, they have rejections. So I explained to the lawyer that the only thing important to me right now is getting out of detention. She said I could get out of here on the basis of being in a bad condition, which is easier and faster than doing a new asylum application. I haven't heard back. I have sent her messages. I have tried to call her, but she never replies back.

Perspective on Admissibility Procedure for Syrians

Do you understand why Turkey is deemed a safe country for Syrians? What are your thoughts on this?

Yes, because of the deal that Erdogan had with the European Union, and with Greece in 2016, and they applied it in 2020 to take Syrians to Turkey. Before I travelled and I came to Greece, I had no idea about this deal. Since I came here, I was informed and knew about it. We checked it out on the internet after coming here, why they treat Syrians as though they are Turkish, and we understood what was the reason for that. For a second it makes you feel like you're Turkish, not Syrian. It's really unfair, there's a lot of asylum seekers of different nationalities who get accepted even if their countries aren't that dangerous. For us it is really dangerous and there is a war there. Legally when you get rejected within three days, they should send you back to your country, to your hometown, or to somewhere else. For us it's different because they can't deport us to Syria.

Are you aware that the asylum procedure for Syrians in Greece differs for those who arrive on the mainland and those who arrive on the islands? Or that the asylum procedure is different for different nationalities on the island?

No, I didn't know that. Okay, so I didn't know that much until one of my friends staying in Chios called me and asked: "where are you?" I said: "I'm in Kos". He said: "There is a family that submitted an application for asylum in Chios and they got rejected, then they gave them expulsion papers and they moved to Athens, they applied for asylum again and they got accepted", and I was like: "What's going on, is it a different country on the mainland?" He said he doesn't know but they got accepted. I have been here for 15 months and most nationalities are accepted except Syrians. Palestinians, Moroccans, Liberians are accepted. Palestinians said in the interview the reason why they left their country is because they don't have the stuff for the nargileh and then they got accepted. Except the Syrians, I wish that there was anyone who got accepted during the period I was staying.

How do you feel about your current situation?

Well, it's really hard. I'm thinking sometimes to hang myself and end my life. If I knew that I was going to be arrested only for one day, I would never let them see my face. I would rather stay in Syria and be killed in my country after destroying my house, than being in jail one day here in Greece. During my stay here I overthink a lot and I can't sleep. Sometimes I think this is my life and I'll never get out of detention. The psychologist isn't really that professional, they give everyone Depon. We call the psychologist the "king of the Depon". We had someone who was sick and living next to us, and he asked for the doctors for 4 days, continually, and they wrote down his name but the doctor didn't call him, and he died, and no one asked about him. And then the police came to investigate if someone killed him, but it's their fault, they didn't care about taking him, and he was in a really bad medical situation. Since my lawyer is not responding to me, I get really anxious and I want to hit my head through the wall.

What do you want people to know about the situation for Syrians on the islands?

Our only hope is just to get out of the detention, even if they want to send us back to Syria. I mean, we've been here a long period already. Some of us have already spent here a year and a half, a year and a couple of months. We've been separated from our families. We thought we were going to travel and support our families financially. Right now what's happening is quite the opposite, because we're inside detention, and the condition in Syria everyone knows it's really bad as well. The food in detention is really really bad, it's not a human living criteria, because there are a lot of small creatures inside, like mosquitoes, small things, bugs, the caravans are really bad for human beings to live inside. And the food is not enough, we just eat to not feel hungry, that's the only point.

My only question is why they arrested us and kept us inside detention for a year and a half. We're not criminals, we're refugees. Some people have criminal backgrounds, they sell hashish or they have it, and they arrest them for a while and bring them to detention, and after two months they get out of detention.

Interview 4

Personal Information and Living Conditions

Name: Abbas

Age: 27

Family Status: Widower

Status: rejected at first instance, now in Austria

Could you introduce yourself?

I am Abbas, I was married and I am now widowed. It happened in Syria. I arrived in Greece alone.

Do you have any medical conditions or disabilities?

I have Hepatitis B. It gives lots of symptoms that are always there: no appetite, yellowness of the eyes, vomiting blood. It got worse during the period in Greece. I still have the symptoms but the vomiting blood has stopped.

I also have a problem with my left hand, some veins are blocked. Now I'm in Austria and I can say that the difference between Greece and Austria is like between sky and earth, extremely different, especially as it concerns the medical system.

Have you ever experienced any forms of serious violence?

In Syria I lost all my family with Sarin gas. I had problems with the police in Syria and Turkey. I was in jail for 2 months, conditions there are generally bad.

Where have you lived in Greece?

I lived in a cave outside Vial, in terrible conditions, regardless of my medical condition.

First-Instance Procedure

When did you arrive in Greece?

In October 2019

What did you understand about the asylum procedure at this time?

In the first few weeks, I decided that I would stay in Greece. The procedure was clear at the beginning, they explained it to me.

Did you seek legal advice at this stage?

Yes. Most of what made me look for legal advice is my medical situation. I think there are more benefits from the NGOs than from the authorities and the government.

Did anyone else advise you regarding the asylum procedure at this stage?

Yes, other Syrians gave me some information about the asylum procedure. I was hearing mostly about the lies. If you want to talk to any authority, it is best for you to lie, not to tell the truth. To make a drama of the situation, in order to get what you want. With the NGOs it was different, they were saying all the time that you have to be honest.

It was very widespread information that for registration it was normal questioning and basic information. But with the EASO status determination interview, it was clear that no result would come from it and that you would be rejected. I know of people that entered the interview and were refusing to answer the questions and saying to the caseworker: "You can write whatever you want, why to ask me? There's no benefit in this questioning". It's widely known because of the experience of all the others. I have an episode to tell you regarding one of the camp authorities. They talk to Syrians in a way that shows that they don't like them, they underestimate them. There was this Syrian guy who had a dog. One of the camp authorities told this guy that he had to set the dog free because he would get a rejection and the dog would be sad because he would have to leave... She was anticipating the sadness of the dog. Animals are worth more than Syrians.

How did you feel prior to your interview?

I remember clearly that before the interview, a few minutes before, I was with my lawyer and I asked her if I could just leave the island and withdraw the application. I knew it was a waste of time. I knew the rejection was already ready and I was wondering: "Why do all this for nothing?"

What were your impressions of the interviewer or the interpreter?

The interviewer did not affirm my prior feelings of distrust. I was with my lawyer and they dealt with me with awareness, they were more careful. While I had no problems with the interpreter.

How did you feel about the questions you were asked?

It was clear it was routine questions, they don't care about details. They choose what they care about. If I had to ask the questions, they would have been different, to see if someone is really a refugee. Especially for Syrians, whatever you say and express they accept it as ok, they don't ask follow up questions.

Do you think you said everything you wanted to say during your interview?

I haven't said lots of things. The way they were dealing with the questions did not give me the chance to add explanations or thoughts. For example, when they asked about my family, they asked where they were. I told them they died. And they just went on with questions. It's a family, it's not one person. They didn't ask anything, they underestimate the life of the human. How can you not ask anything more than that?

How did you feel following the interview?

If I had a bit of hope before the interview (and I did not), after that I felt just like I am one more number to add to the Syrian population there to wait for a rejection, to wait for a second rejection and to get a deportation. I just wanted to fasten the procedure. And that's when I gave up and I left towards Austria. There was no hope at all.

Perspective on Admissibility Procedure for Syrians**Do you understand why Turkey is deemed a safe country for Syrians? What are your thoughts on this?**

It's a very unfair decision. It is not safe at all.

Are you aware that the asylum procedure for Syrians in Greece differs for those who arrive on the mainland and those who arrive on the islands? Or that the asylum procedure is different for different nationalities on the island?

I heard that if you go to Athens or Thessaloniki it would be faster and easier. But because of my sickness, I chose the easier but more dangerous route that is the sea. I would have walked for weeks if I came by land. I don't really understand. I know some that entered around the same dates as I did, but in the mainland and they finished their procedure already. They are now getting their ID and passport. And why on the islands this is the situation? What's going on on the islands about having the Syrians separated from the others? It is really something I don't get. What is behind it? One of the UN employees, she spoke Arabic and she told me honestly:

“Leave this island and continue your way, it’s the best for you”. For 8 months I was fooled around. I believed in the system and that something would have happened, but it was just a waste of time.

How do you feel about your current situation?

Now that I’m in Austria I am much more comfortable and feel lots of hope. Besides, the healthcare system in Austria is very good, it’s a very known fact and I feel safer here.

What do you want people to know about the situation for Syrians on the islands?

As I know and experienced this unfair treatment, I am willing to help with the report. The guy who was living with me in the cave is now there for a year and half and he just received his first rejection. I want to spread the word on what’s going on because no one is focusing on it.

Interview 5

Personal Information and Living Conditions

Name: Zeana

Age: 22

Family Status: Married

Status: Rejected at first instance

Could you introduce yourself?

I’m Zeana, I’m married and my husband is in Germany.

Do you have any medical conditions or disabilities?

I have asthma and I have high blood pressure. I don’t have any medical papers from doctors in Greece but I saw a doctor in the RIC and in the detention centre. My psychological health is bad. I tried to commit suicide in Turkey and have thought about it here in Greece.

Have you ever experienced any forms of serious violence?

Attempted rape in Turkey and war in Syria.

Where have you lived in Greece?

I live in the detention center in Kos.

First-Instance Procedure

When did you arrive in Greece?

In June 2020.

What did you understand about the asylum procedure at this time?

When I came to the island of Kos and entered the camp, immediately, the Syrians said to me: “It’s over, the Syrians here are rejected. No Syrians get refugee status. The Syrians in general are rejected for asylum”. This is the thing that I knew when I arrived. I did not believe them at first. But now I see that no Syrians are accepted. Maybe one in a hundred only takes a residency permit. All of the others are rejected. They do not accept anyone, ever.

Did anyone else advise you regarding the asylum procedure at this stage?

This is what I heard—that all Syrians are rejected. There are people here that have been here a year or a year and a half and until now their procedures have still not finished and then, in the end, they receive a rejection, and until now they have not been released. They sent them a deportation order but after a year or a year and a half they are still here. And I know that the Syrians, if they are rejected for asylum, they stay in detention for 18 months. This period of time is a really long time in a person’s life. And we are women who don’t have anyone with us and we are in here for 18 months – this is a thing that is really “haram.” Besides, they said that psychological reports would help you a bit with asylum, or if you are a bit sick and have a report, this would help you get asylum. But it is impossible here (in detention) to get reports. Here there is only one doctor and it is forbidden for people to go to visit the doctor, unless it is absolutely necessary and it is impossible for people to get reports. Maybe for one out of a hundred people they make reports. It is the detention center I’m talking about. In the open camp (RIC) there are doctors and reports. But here in detention you can never get reports or anything that would help you a bit in your asylum procedures. Or maybe if you have a paper that shows that you were imprisoned in Syria or that shows that your life was in danger in Turkey or Syria, this could maybe also help you with your asylum procedures. Medical reports and reports that show that your life was in danger in Turkey or Syria: this is what I heard would help me.

How did you feel prior to your interview?

I was very scared. I know that the majority of Syrians are rejected. I didn’t have any hope at all that I would be accepted. I didn’t really want to do the interview, to be honest, because the situation for getting asylum is really bad for Syrians. But yes, I was very scared and anxious and I was afraid of their reactions during the interview—I mean how would they question me and things like that.

How did you feel about the questions you were asked? Do you think you said everything you wanted to say during your interview?

I was really surprised after the interview. Between you and me, I was thinking: why were the majority of the questions about Turkey and why only for Syrians they ask only about Turkey. Why, for example, don’t Iraqis or Palestinians or other nationalities get asked about Turkey, why do they only ask Syrians about all of these questions about Turkey. In the end I know that most of what I spoke about was not put into the transcript, because I have a lot of friends that said a lot about Turkey, and spoke a lot about what happened to them when they were in Turkey, and then, when their decisions came, they were rejected and the rejections said that they did not say anything about why Turkey wasn’t safe in the interview. After the interview, I was really anxious about the questions. They asked me a lot of questions, and I was really tired without a break. I spent four hours in the interview and I was really tired, and most of the questions weren’t about me personally, they were just

about Turkey.

Perspective on Admissibility Procedure for Syrians

Do you understand why Turkey is deemed a safe country for Syrians? What are your thoughts on this?

Of course the situation is very hard. And this thing that is happening is just not humane. Because of the dispute between Turkey and Greece, all of the Syrians are rejected and Greece came to consider Turkey a safe country and to reject the Syrians. But Turkey also rejects the Syrians. Greece rejects and Turkey rejects, so where should we go? Of course our life has become very hard. After exposing ourselves to the arrival in Greece and to smuggling and maybe to prison, then the last thing is that they give us two rejections and return us to Turkey. This is something really bad and not human at all.

Are you aware that the asylum procedure for Syrians in Greece differs for those who arrive on the mainland and those who arrive on the islands? Or that the asylum procedure is different for different nationalities on the island?

Yes I know this. But I didn't know this at all before I came to Greece. When I came here, I didn't know that I would be in the detention center and I didn't know that on the islands the Syrians are all rejected. I didn't know that in Athens Syrians are accepted, and on the islands they are rejected because the islands are a border between Turkey and Greece, and very close to Turkey. When they arrested me I was surprised, I thought: "Why?" And they told me that after 25 days I would be released from prison, and I believed them but then, when I spoke to the other Syrians in detention, they said: "No, this is a lie, you will not be released after 25 days and it is impossible to be released after 25 days. You will receive two rejections and you will stay here a year at a minimum". Once I came here I knew everything. I also know that the asylum procedure is different for different nationalities. For example there are people here with us, Palestinians for example, and their procedures differ from our procedures, their procedures are really easy. They go and they do the interview without any problem and after the interview, around a week, they receive a positive decision and are released. They go to the interview and all of them know that they will be accepted. So of course their situation is very different from the situation of Syrians.

How do you feel about your current situation?

I am very upset about this situation. This imprisonment that we are in is very hard. Even for animals it would be impossible to live here. In the end we are not free in my opinion. My life has been taken from me. I'm not allowed to leave and nothing is allowed to enter. Also, I am very afraid of what my decision will be. Any negative decision will mean more time here and the conditions in this prison are very hard in terms of food, in terms of drinks and water, in terms of life in general. It is very very hard, it is even forbidden for you to buy anything from outside and bring it inside, this is something that is forbidden from happening. Even money is forbidden from entering—only 50€ per person. And of course 50€ is not enough for people here, because here, you know, there is a small car that brings in food to sell and the prices from this car are very very expensive. It's not normal. I thought that Greece would respect me and respect human rights, but since I've come here and been imprisoned I have seen a completely different thing: they do not respect my humanity at all and they do not respect human rights at all. This is something that is rejected by European countries. And us, we didn't do anything, like commit a crime or anything, and so why are we here in detention? Why is this happening

What do you want people to know about the situation for Syrians on the islands?

I want to say to them that the situation here is bad just for Syrians. Only for the Syrians you can be a million percent certain that they will get a rejection and you will stay in prison for a year or so and this is something that is completely inhumane. I would like to tell them that there is no humanity at all and no respect for the people's freedom at all. Here there is a big difference between some people and others. There's no equality and no mercy. The Syrians' lives here are very hard, very very hard. There are children, old women who are sick, there are people here, women who are crying, they are crying every day. Us here, our lives are very hard. Harder than our lives in Syria. We could not imagine this situation, ever. I hope for something that is not this. I hope for something that is just a little bit humane, where they don't put us in detention and where people are allowed to live freely on the island in order to complete their procedures. And I hope that no one receives a rejection. I hope that Syrians, or no person actually, are not put into detention—not children, not women, not the elderly. Now here there are really old people and they are sick and they don't release them. So I hope from the European countries that after explaining the situation, and that 99 percent of us receive rejections, they will help us. We fled war. We can't return. The biggest thing is that we are Syrian. Syria is not a safe country. There's a war. If there wasn't a war, then we wouldn't have left our country, we wouldn't have come to live in this camp.