



EQUAL RIGHTS

Beyond Borders

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GREEK OMBUDSMAN CALLS FOR UNIMPEDED ACCESS TO ASYLUM REGISTRATION PROCEDURE FOR TURKISH NATIONALS

Asylum seekers from Turkey face significant obstacles in the registration of their asylum application in Greece. Besides not receiving a response when trying to reach the Offices of the Asylum Service in person, by e-mail or by filling out the dedicated self-registration form, Turkish language is not supported in the Skype-based registration appointment system of the Asylum Service.

Equal Rights Beyond Borders has recently received numerous requests for legal aid from Turkish nationals who seek for asylum in Greece. The majority had entered Greece in 2020 and had several times tried to reach the Asylum Service without success. We addressed the Greek Ombudsman and asked for its intervention on behalf of 8 applicants and their children.

The Greek Ombudsman has now intervened and asked for the views of the Asylum Service on a number of issues, among which the non-inclusion of the Turkish language in the Skype-based asylum registration system – which is problematic as such – and the in-practice implementation of the self-registration procedure. The Ombudsman further asked for the views and the actions of the Asylum Service for all cases in question, namely also for the persons who got finally registered by the time of the intervention, as the entailed delays had an adverse impact on their access to healthcare and reception conditions.

Turkish asylum applicants ranked seventh in the number of asylum applications in 2020¹. Their interview dates are as far ahead as 2024². Concerns over the management of the applications of Turkish nationals were also raised with a relevant Parliamentary Question.³

The registration of asylum applications in Greece is dysfunctional. European and Greek Law oblige Greece to register an asylum application within in 3-6 days after an informal request was filed.⁴ That applicants are requested to conduct a registration through Skype is highly problematic as such. Without an option to register in Turkish language and with general accessibility issues, it is further dysfunctional in practice. Beyond this, emails remain unanswered, persons are sent away when trying to approach the Asylum Service directly.

Among the applicants represented in the procedure and who all faced severe health issues, several had even managed to proceed to the self-registration of their asylum application through the online system

¹ Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2020 Annual Information Note, available at: <https://bit.ly/36mGqgx>, pp. 13

² U.S. Embassy in Greece, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2020: Greece, available at: <https://bit.ly/2V2dQbq>

³ Kaminis G., Parliamentary Question in the context of Parliamentary Control, 03.03.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/36fsUEJ>

⁴ Cf. Art. 6 Directive 2013/33/EU, Art. 65 Greek Asylum Law 4636/2019.

of the Asylum Service, to which the authority had never responded. That to say, the self-registration procedure does not guarantee the registration of the asylum application, with a scheduled appointment and an in-person visit at a Regional Asylum Office to be necessary. **One of them, an elderly and gravely ill applicant, was staying in precarious living conditions since February 2020 and contracted COVID-19 in March. He was hospitalized and died in May 2021. Before, he was deprived of medical care and suitable living conditions by not being registered to benefit from the guarantees for asylum seekers.**

Despite this particularly deplorable example, all persons included in our application suffered from medical issues requiring immediate medical care or belonged to a vulnerable group according to the law, a condition of vulnerability which was known to the Asylum Service through the individual e-mail communications of the applicants and the attached medical documents. Not having their asylum applications registered, also these applicants lacked access to healthcare, as the relevant health insurance number is issued after the completion of the registration procedure.

After taking into account the presented constraints, the Ombudsman requested from the Asylum Service to provide information on the views and the actions that the latter will undertake to lift the obstacles for the cases in question. On this occasion, the Ombudsman requests detailed information on the non-inclusion of the Turkish language in the Skype-based system and the actions of the Service to fill that gap. The independent authority further asked information on the in-practice implementation of the self-registration procedure, and more specifically about the actions the Asylum Service takes from the submission of the self-registration form until the issuance of an asylum-seeker's card, about the predicted and the in-practice elapsed time from the self-registration to the completion of the registration procedure, and about the issuance of a certification of completion of the self-registration procedure.

Equal Rights Beyond Borders will continue to monitor the in-practice compliance of the set asylum registration procedures with Greek and European Law, as well as the implementation of the Ombudsman's recommendations, until an effective procedure for an unhindered and timely access to asylum registration is established.

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