

## Lives on Hold: Report exposes 14 month delays for asylum registration in Greece

23 November 2021 - Refugees fleeing war and persecution risk being left in limbo for up to 14 months if entering the European Union through Greece.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of more than 1,100 case files and a series of in-depth interviews with people seeking asylum, *Lives on Hold* exposes the impact of extreme delays in accessing asylum - due to an inefficient and unfair pre-registration system which uses the communications app, Skype.

Currently, people seeking asylum on mainland Greece, Crete and Rhodes must inform the Greek Asylum Service that they wish to apply for asylum via Skype, before they receive an appointment to appear in person to fully register their claim.

Research by Mobile Info Team, a Greece-based charity, shows that people seeking asylum who need to reach the Greek Asylum Service via Skype, are forced to live in extreme poverty, in dangerous and degrading environments and experience homelessness at a rate at least 74 times higher than the national average. Without any documentation proving their right to be in Greece, this group lives in well-founded fear of detention, deportation and pushbacks.

The analysis by Mobile Info Team reveals that:

- On average, people had still not reached the Greek Asylum Service on Skype after 14 months
- Seven out of 25 people were still trying to reach Skype after two years
- 1 in 6 people in need of safety in Greece do not know how to access the asylum system
- 56% of people been forced to work illegally and most were being exploited
- 84% of people found out about Skype from people within the refugee community with only 4% of people finding out about the Skype system from the state
- People from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are, at times, prevented from accessing asylum
- People pay unscrupulous Lawyers up to €500 for documents they believe will protect them from being deported but have no legal basis to do so
- After international protection, access to healthcare was seen as the most important reason for being registered in Greece

Michael Kientzle, Director of Mobile Info Team, said:

*Our research evidences that the Skype pre-registration system remains the most pervasive obstacle to asylum in Greece, with the effects of the lottery-like procedure being devastating for many.*

*With a surge of refugees from Afghanistan seeking safety in Europe increasingly likely, these findings should act as a wake up call for the Greek government and Europe to improve access to asylum.*

*We call on the Greek administration to take on our recommendations to allow for fair and efficient access to the asylum procedure in Greece for every individual wishing to apply.*

Sayyid, a 22-year-old asylum seeker from Afghanistan, said:

*“I want to make clear that the Skype system is a fake system. It is not a good system, nobody answers our calls. It’s true, it does not have value.”*

Despite the need for fast and fair access to asylum, the Skype system stands in stark contrast to any notion of protection and remains the most hidden but persistent barrier to accessing asylum in Greece.

Yet, Mobile Info Team believes these issues are easily rectified. Instead of Skype hindering access to asylum, the system should help those who live remotely, or who cannot travel to connect with the Greek Asylum Service.

Mobile Info Team proposes a series of practical recommendations to ensure unhindered access to asylum. These include, increasing staffing capacity on the Skype lines and the number of hours people can call GAS on Skype each week as well as ensuring that all individuals also have the option to lodge a claim in writing or to pre-register their claim in person.

## **Notes**

- Mobile Info Team is a Greece-based organisation that provides advice and assistance to people seeking asylum and refugees throughout Greece

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