

Mobile Info Team (MIT) and Refugee Legal Support (RLS) carried out research on the asylum procedure for people applying for the first time who live on the Greek mainland, Crete or Rhodes. The aim of the research was to understand the impact of changes to the Greek asylum system introduced in September 2022, when two new facilities for screening and registration were established, located close to Thessaloniki (Diavata RIC) and Athens (Malakasa RIC). We interviewed 19 people who applied for asylum through the new system and 8 Greek lawyers and legal practitioners. We asked questions about people's experiences accessing the asylum procedure and the screening process within the mainland RICs, and about the effects of being undocumented on their daily lives for those who had to wait a long time for their registration appointment.

## KEY FINDINGS

### 1. Access to the asylum procedure:

- In general people found it **difficult to access clear and accessible information** on how to apply for asylum for the first time on the Greek mainland, and they relied primarily on personal networks and NGOs who supported them to apply;
- There are still extensive **delays** in the asylum system which mean that people submitting their first asylum claim on the mainland may have to wait **weeks or even months** to register their claim;
- Respondents reported that it was **difficult to use the online platform** to book an appointment at Malakasa or Diavata RIC because they lacked confidence navigating the technology or frequently encountered **technical difficulties**, for instance the platform crashing or being unavailable for extended periods of time up to three and a half months;



## **2. The impact of being outside the asylum procedure:**

- While waiting for registration appointments, applicants are not recognised as asylum seekers by the Greek authorities; this means that they may be picked up by the police and detained as undocumented, facing possible removal from Greece;
- The new procedure for first asylum claims involves a screening process in two facilities located close to Athens and Thessaloniki, Malakasa RIC and Diavata RIC, where applicants are detained for a period lasting up to 25 days, and cannot exit the facility or receive visitors, including their lawyers in some cases;
- While undergoing screening at Malakasa RIC and Diavata RIC, applicants have limited access to legal information and assistance, and are not guaranteed adequate access to medical treatment and psychosocial support, particularly for more complex needs;

## **3. Access to the procedure for vulnerable people:**

- There is no way to flag if you have a vulnerability in the new system to get an earlier appointment or receive special support; in some cases people with vulnerabilities received different treatment if they were represented by a lawyer, including cases where vulnerable people were allowed to exit the registration facility after just one or two days and did not have to stay up to 25 days.

## **Recommendations to the Greek State**

We recommend that the Greek state ends the use of detention for people seeking asylum on the mainland. We also recommend that the authorities register claims within the legal timeframe and issue documentation to people who have booked an appointment via the online platform which proves that they are an asylum seeker and have a right to stay on Greek territory, therefore protecting against arbitrary detention, and access support services including housing and healthcare. We further recommend that the authorities establish a system for identifying vulnerable applicants and ensuring they are prioritised and can register their claim close to their accommodation in a Regional Asylum Office, and have access to the support they need prior to and following the registration of their asylum claim.