

Blocked from the System: Report uncovers harrowing stories of those excluded from asylum procedures in Greece, who face heightened risk of pushbacks

19th May 2022 - People seeking asylum on mainland Greece, Crete and Rhodes are blocked from registering their claims, as testimonies prove that increasingly narrow avenues are almost impossible to navigate and hold the risk of grave consequences.

The devastating effects of the termination of the Skype pre-registration system in November 2021 have been revealed by in-depth research based on 144 case files and 18 interviews. *Blocked from the System* finds that six months after the policy changes requiring arrivals to pass through Reception and Identification Centres (RICs), there is a near-total lack of access to the asylum system.

NGO Mobile Info Team, based in Greece, demonstrates that all three narrow avenues to registering asylum claims - evidencing vulnerability, registering a police note, or passing through Fylakio RIC - are dysfunctional. Vulnerabilities are extremely difficult to prove, even for particularly vulnerable cases such as victims of torture, while police notes are inconsistently issued and registered. Research shows Fylakio RIC does not accept self-referred asylum-seekers, and furthermore it is located in the Evros region, where according to testimonies, 71% of pushback groups on mainland Greece in 2021 were apprehended.

Based on the voices of those excluded from asylum procedures, the report shows that undocumented asylum-seekers in Greece are now facing increased exploitation, ill health, and debilitating fear of being illegally pushed back.

New analysis by Mobile Info Team summarises that:

- 80% of interviewees have experienced homelessness or relied on others for shelter since being in Greece.
- Over 60% of interviewees were being exploited, with those working within informal economies earning between €1.50 to €2 an hour.
- 60% of interviewees suffered from physical or mental ill health and had not received support from services.
- Over 50% of interviewees discussed their debilitating concern of encountering the police describing well-founded fears of pushbacks, detention or deportation.
- With space for 282 people, Fylakio Reception and Identification Centre does not have capacity to register all mainland Greece arrivals, and does not accept self-referred arrivals for registration. Mobile Info Team did not find a single incident of someone successfully managing to present themselves at Fylakio.
- According to testimonies 71% of pushback groups in 2021 on mainland Greece were apprehended in the Evros region, where Fylakio RIC is located, making it an unsafe and unviable option.
- 67% of interviewees who reached out to Mobile Info Team regarding police notes, said they were not issued with one.

Manon Louis, Advocacy Officer for Mobile Info Team, said:

“It is disgraceful that people-on-the-move who wish to register their asylum claim are forced to take actions which increase their risk of being pushed back, causing a huge amount of added stress and fear.

As the temporary protection recently offered to over 19,000 Ukrainians shows [UNHCR data], the Greece is very much capable of implementing a system which enables safe access to asylum, shelter and basic services. They must apply this protection on an equal and non-discriminatory basis.”

Jacques*, a victim of torture who is forced to remain undocumented, said:

“Claiming asylum in Greece is very tough. In five months I did not meet a lawyer, in five months I did not get a police note. It is like you are not on Greek territory, but still you are there.

For me it is about taking refugees more seriously; consider us like humans. It is not for nothing that someone fled his country to come here.”

Mobile Info Team is extremely concerned by the conditions that people are forced to live in as they struggle to register their claims.

Whilst the immensely flawed Skype system left people waiting for an average of 14 months to pre-register their asylum claims, its termination obstructs access to international protection in Greece. Without documents, people are forced to live on the fringes of society at extreme risk of destitution and pushbacks.

People in need of safety should have access to swift and fair asylum procedures that enable them to rebuild their lives. Mobile Info Team urges Greece to provide the legal protection and material reception conditions that people need, and recommends that the European Commission holds Greece accountable when it flouts international protection standards.

Notes

- Mobile Info Team is a Greece-based organisation that provides advice and assistance to people seeking asylum and refugees throughout Greece
- UNHCR figure - <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/92005>
- *Jacques' name has been changed to protect his identity
- Link to report: www.mobileinfoteam.org/blockedfromthesystem

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