



Press Release

Report of Legal Organizations on the quality of remote asylum interviews at RAO Lesvos and the conditions they are conducted under, which pose a health risk to asylum seekers and employees.

Mytilene, December 8: On October 8, 2020, the Regional Asylum Office (RAO) of Lesvos started the implementation of the pilot program for remote asylum interviews. Two months later, amid contradictory announcements from the RAO and while access to legal aid or other basic services¹ is not yet ensured for all asylum seekers, we as lawyers of legal organizations in Lesvos wish to highlight a number of important issues. Specifically:

The serving of interview invitations, if it takes place at all, is usually done on the day before the interview and often even on the same day, just a few hours before the interview. On several occasions it has also been observed that applicants are pressured into conducting interviews at extremely short notice and in a language other than their native language. As a result, applicants are effectively deprived of their lawful right to prepare properly prior to the interview and to consult a legal or other counselor.

At the same time, significant technical difficulties, such as poor sound quality and poor connectivity, lead to the frequent interruption of interviews, prolonging their duration.

¹ See the Press Release published on the 17th of September, by Legal Organizations operating in Lesvos on the procedures concerning asylum seekers during the emergency situation.

As a result, asylum seekers are forced to recount / relive their traumatic experiences multiple times and are often left without water or food until late at night, as no relevant provisions have been made. The facilities and rooms in which the interviews are conducted (Pagani) are insufficient. They are not fitted with adequate sound insulation, as a result of which the principle of confidentiality, which should govern the asylum procedure, is not guaranteed, in violation of national and European legislation; nor is the personal data of applicants for international protection safeguarded through the questionable platform that is used to conduct the remote interviews. It is clear that these conditions have a detrimental effect on the quality of the process.

In addition, the rooms are very small and insufficiently ventilated, and often the door is locked from the outside. The waiting areas are overcrowded, with dozens of men, women and children forced to wait for their interview for several hours every day. When the weather conditions are bad, they are forced to wait in a small container (10 m²), from which they are not allowed to come out and which does not have sufficient ventilation, while in the few toilets that are available there are no disinfecting products. The above mentioned conditions contradict the relevant statement provided by the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum on 2.11.2020 in the framework of the Parliamentary control.²

The above-mentioned conditions endanger the health of asylum seekers, lawyers / counselors and Asylum Service employees who are present at the site.

Our multiple requests to ensure appropriate conditions for the interviews and thus guarantee the fair and effective nature of the asylum procedure, protect the health of asylum seekers and employees and allow for the effective and unimpeded representation of our clients have not been addressed by the Asylum Service. Instead, we have often been treated contemptuously and offensively while performing our duties.

In our report sent on the 4th of December 2020, we have asked the Greek authorities to comply with their obligations and to inform us about the measures they intend to take to ensure the quality of the interviews conducted remotely and to safeguard the health of asylum seekers, employees of the RAO Lesbos and lawyers amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The undersigning organisations:

² (ii) See PN: 489/2020 - 2.11.2020 answer of the Minister of Immigration and Asylum to P.N: 292 / 8.10.2020 Question posed within the Parliamentary control, available here: <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/67715b2c-ec81-4f0c-ad6a-476a34d732bd/11422935.pdf>

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