



Mytilene – May 19, 2020

The instructions for the resumption of the operation of the Asylum Service lead to violations of the fundamental rights of asylum seekers

HIAS Greece denounces the failure of the Asylum Service to ensure the exercise of the fundamental rights of applicants for international protection since the resumption of the operation of Lesvos RAO yesterday, May 18, 2020, and after the two months-long suspension of services due to COVID-19.

In particular, during the suspension, Lesvos RAO served rejection decisions on 1,789 applicants (at least 1,400 at first instance), who are now required to submit their appeal until May 28, although, despite the provisions of Law 4636/2019 and the relevant EU legislative framework, Lesvos RAO does not provide free legal aid for the drafting of the appellate brief. Further, in view of the restriction of movement of asylum seekers in Moria RIC due to COVID-19, the Police authorities have already imposed fines of 150 euros on people who went to the city of Mytilene in search of free legal aid from Civil Society organizations. Furthermore, applicants are requested to renew their cards on predetermined dates in May, in contravention of Ministerial Decision 7330/2020, as amended on 15.5.20. which provides for a six-month extension of the cards for all applicants, in the context of COVID-19 prevention measures.

By the same token, those who arrived to Lesvos from March 1st to 17th are requested to approach the premises of Lesvos RAO every day at 8am, although no measures have been taken to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 and to avoid overcrowding outside its offices. In relation to the above, HIAS Greece has submitted, together with other organizations from the Legal Aid Working Group of Lesvos, a complaint to the Greek Ombudsman.

Finally, HIAS Greece expresses its concern that the above practices, which lead to the violation of fundamental rights and principles of both Greek as well as EU and international law appear to take place in the context of recent announcements by the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum regarding the intended immediate return of 11,000 asylum seekers to Turkey.