

Open letter: Put an end to the disruption of interpretation services still undermining asylum seekers' rights in Greece

To

The Minister of Migration and Asylum, **Mr. Nikolas Panagiotopoulos**
The Deputy Minister of Migration and Asylum, **Ms. Sofia Voultepsi**
The Minister of Health, **Mr. Adonis Georgiadis**
The Alternate Minister of Health, **Ms. Irimi Agapidaki**

In copy

The Secretary-General for Migration Policy, **Mr. Manos Logothetis**
The Secretary-General for the Reception of Asylum Seekers, **Ms. Dimitra Lygoura**
The Head of the European Asylum Agency (EUAA) mission in Greece, **Ms. Jette Christiansen**
The Head of Unit at the EU Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, **Ms. Katerina Wolfova**
The UNHCR Representative in Greece, **Ms. Maria Clara Martin**
The Greek Ombudsman, **Mr. Andreas Pottakis**
The President of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, **Ms. Maria Gavouneli**

Dear Ministers,

We are writing this letter to express our deep concern over the persistent lack of interpretation services for asylum seekers in Greece, who are now facing even greater restrictions on their basic rights, such as effective access to the asylum procedure and access to healthcare. While [media](#) and [civil society actors](#) highlighted the [severe shortages](#) in interpreters and other gaps in the provision of interpretation services over the past several months, no concrete measures towards reinstating a functional interpretation system in Greek asylum procedures seem to have been put in place.

We would like to remind the recipients of this letter that the previous provider of interpretation services, Metadrasi, suspended its operations on 14th May 2024 due to months of delay in payment by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA). Publicly accessible [documents](#) show that payments for work completed in December 2023 by Metadrasi, were only disbursed by the Ministry in July this year, amounting to a seven-month delay. The Ministry has yet to issue an announcement regarding the reinstatement of interpretation services, which are funded by the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) 2021-2027, either in connection with Metadrasi or another provider.

Due to ongoing delays in renewing the contract for interpretation provision, there is currently nearly no interpretation available within the Asylum Service and extremely limited numbers of interpreters in refugee camps both on the mainland and the Greek islands. We understand that equally unclear is the fate of temporary arrangements meant to cover urgent gaps, such as the translation support provided by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) in

registration sites throughout the country. By the end of September 2024, EUAA's provision of interpretation services was reduced significantly, affecting mainly the camps on the mainland.

Further, the recently launched Hippocrates programme does not allocate funds for interpretation services, creating a significant obstacle to delivering healthcare to asylum seekers living in camps. The lack of interpretation further burdens hospitals and medical facilities, which are already facing shortages, and increases the risk of health deterioration for migrants and asylum seekers who experience delays in accessing essential services.

The undersigned organisations have been made aware of multiple instances where as a result of the situation, asylum seekers can hardly progress with their asylum claims or communicate effectively with the authorities, leading to serious consequences on all aspects of their lives:

Restrictions on access to asylum leaves people in limbo without protection

Without interpreters, applicants still often have their interviews postponed because the Greek Asylum Service does not have interpreters who speak a language they can understand. Few interviews also take place [remotely](#), posing a risk of miscommunication and [other difficulties](#). No interpreter assistance means that all aspects of the asylum procedure are affected, as in many cases asylum interviews cannot take place, decisions cannot be notified to the applicants, and subsequent applications or lodging of appeals cannot be performed.

Despite the severe shortage of interpreters, asylum seekers are still advised by the authorities to continue with any actions related to their asylum claims. As a result, people are sometimes expected to travel, often at their own expense, to reach asylum officers in urban centres, only to be told that their appointment has been postponed. Since people seeking international protection are not able to progress their asylum claims or appeals, they are being forced to live in Greece without access to basic rights, such as healthcare, and without the possibility to work or receive [cash assistance payments](#).

Lack of access to healthcare and further isolation

Language barriers due to lack of interpretation can be particularly grave for people with vulnerabilities and urgent or complex medical needs, including those suffering from chronic illnesses or mental health conditions, as well as gender-based violence (GBV) survivors. With limited or nonexistent interpreter assistance, vulnerability assessments are not always conducted properly. Beyond being a procedural oversight, lack of interpretation can further be a direct violation of the fundamental right to healthcare, as people are often left unable to communicate their symptoms, receive accurate diagnoses, or understand treatment instructions.

The situation is an additional blow to the already substandard living conditions of asylum seekers in Greece, recently further affected by [months of delays](#) in cash assistance payments. It also has resulted in the further isolation of those residing in camps, compounding the general lack of support and extremely poor conditions documented in remotely located [mainland refugee camps](#) and in the refugee structures of the [Aegean](#)

[islands](#). As of today, it is still unclear when and how these issues will be resolved, leaving asylum seekers in the dark.

On this account, we urge all recipients of this letter to recognise the gravity of the situation and to take all necessary action to ensure that asylum seekers' interpretation needs are respected by:

- Immediately reinstating interpretation services by either renewing contracts with the previous provider of interpretation services or with another provider;
- Immediately releasing a statement explaining when procedures will resume and the reasons and impact of the disruption;
- Reinstating as soon as possible all asylum processes that continue to be unavailable, particularly the lodging of subsequent applications and first-instance appeals;
- Issuing interim documents to people having received a first rejection, which will allow them to fully exercise their rights in Greece, including the right to work, to access healthcare, reception services, and cash assistance;
- Taking immediate action to reduce the backlog, which was exacerbated by the suspension, and ensuring that delays in issuing and renewing documents are reduced;
- Ensuring that all people impacted by any future disruptions of asylum procedures (a) are adequately informed of the impact on their access to the asylum procedure and other fundamental rights and (b) have access to temporary documentation protecting them from police checks and arbitrary detention;
- Coordinating with the Ministry of Health to provide immediate interpretation support in healthcare settings, particularly for urgent and emergency care.

Yours sincerely,

Action for Women
ARSIS Association for the Social Support of Youth
Avocats Sans Frontières France
Centre for Gender Rights and Equality DIOTIMA
Collective Aid
Changemakers Lab
Doctors Without Borders-Greek section
Dråpen i Havet / Stagona
ECHO100PLUS
Equal Legal Aid
European Lawyers in Lesvos (ELIL)
Equal Rights Beyond Borders
Fenix Humanitarian Legal Aid
Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)
Greek Forum of Migrants
Greek Forum of Refugees
HIAS Greece
I Have Rights.
Inter Alia
INTERSOS HELLAS

Irida Center
Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Greece
Legal Centre Lesvos
Lesvos Solidarity
Lighthouse Relief
Mazí Housing
Mobile Info Team
Project Armonia
Refugee Legal Support
Safe Passage International
Samos Volunteers
Second Tree
Symbiosis-Council of Europe School of Political Studies in Greece
Thalassa of Solidarity
Velos Youth
Yoga and Sport with Refugees