



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS

Directorate C: Migration, Protection and Visa
Unit C.3 : Asylum

Brussels
HOME.C.3/AMR

Dear Mr Shilhav,

Thank you for your letter dated 25 March 2020 regarding the situation in Greece and in particular on the suspension of the registration of asylum applications adopted by the Greek authorities on 1 March 2020, and the overcrowded reception facilities for asylum seekers. The Commission President has asked me to reply on her behalf.

Following the adoption of the measure suspending the registration of asylum applications, the European Commission called on the Greek authorities to comply with fundamental rights and the EU acquis, in particular with regard to the right to access the asylum procedure, the principle of *non refoulement*, and the rules on detention.

The European Commission welcomes the decision by the Greek authorities to end the suspension of asylum registrations on 1 April 2020, and, pending the re-opening of the Greek Asylum Service's public facing activities, to resume the registration of the willingness to apply for international protection, also for those who arrived in Greece during the month of March 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an additional constraint which the Greek authorities have to manage in the context of the very difficult migratory situation. In this context, the European Commission intends to shortly issue guidance to Member States on the implementation of asylum procedures during the pandemic. The guidance provides practical suggestions to implement the rules on asylum, including on reception and implementation of the Dublin regulation, on return and on resettlement.

In particular, making and lodging an asylum application must remain possible and Member States must continue ensuring the applicants' access to basic rights. At the same time, it is understandable that more flexibility could be needed, for example in the application of the deadlines for registering and lodging an application, or in how an application can be lodged. The European Commission stands ready to continue to support the Member States in finding pragmatic solutions, such as providing that applicants do not need to be physically present during the registration of their applications, that applications can be lodged by way of a written form, and/or that videoconferencing can be used for interviews.

Mr Raphael Shilhav
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The guidance also foresees that Member States should take special measures within reception centres to allow social distancing, for example by moving persons from overcrowded centres to alternative centres, or introducing separations within the reception centre. Member States need to put in place systematic medical screening, at least for those most at risk. While quarantine is regulated under national law, it should be both proportionate and non-discriminatory, i.e. applied equally to nationals.

The European Commission is in constant contact with the Greek authorities to assist them in implementing their emergency response plan to deal with a potential COVID-19 outbreak on the islands and in the mainland camps.

In this context, the priority on the islands is to ensure the immediate evacuation of persons at high risk to dedicated places outside the camps, including to hotels on the islands or mainland, to apartments or to open reception facilities, and the availability of containers, consumables, medical equipment and other necessary facilities in the camps for quarantine and treatment purposes.

To this end, the Commission and the Greek authorities work closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, with the International Organisation for Migration as well as with Non-Governmental Organisations. The first transfers to the mainland of people at high risk have already taken place and the process continues as fast as possible.

Moreover, on 2 March 2020, Greece activated the European Civil Protection Mechanism. Member and Participating States actively expressed their support to Greece through this mechanism, by offering over 90 000 items of material assistance in the areas of mobility, health, sanitation and shelter. The items have been delivered in Greece and are being distributed.

In parallel, the European Commission is coordinating the implementation of the relocation exercise with the aim to relocate up to 1600 unaccompanied minors and accompanied sick and vulnerable children and their families to other EU Member States. Given the constraints brought about by the covid-19 pandemic, the European Commission is determined and confident that the relocation transfers will be implemented as soon as possible, and is expecting the first relocations to take place in the next few weeks.

Yours sincerely,

[e-Signed]
Henrik Nielsen
Head of Unit