

Mr Giannis Vrotsis, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
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Dear Minister,

I am writing concerning Greece's continuing failure to grant unhindered access to free healthcare and medicines in the public health system to asylum-seekers, unaccompanied children and children born in Greece from parents with an irregular migration status.

Greek Law grants free access to medical and pharmaceutical services to members of "vulnerable social groups", including refugees, asylum-seekers and minors irrespective of their legal status. This right must be operationalised through the granting of a Social Security Number (AMKA) or, for those who do not fulfil the requirements for AMKA or do not have one, through a special Foreigner's Health Care Card (K.Y.P.A). However, following the decision to withdraw the circular that regulated AMKA for non-Greek nationals in July 2019, there has been no procedure in place to issue this number, and no alternative has been offered to grant free access to healthcare to people who fall within these categories. In October, a new circular regulated the situation of recognised refugees, but not that of asylum-seekers and children of migrants without a regularised status. The process to grant K.Y.P.A cards has also so far remained inactive. The new Asylum Law of November 2019 proposed an alternative for asylum-seekers, the 'Temporary number for insurance and healthcare for third-country nationals' (PAAYPA). However, this instrument has not been operationalised.

As a result, thousands of asylum-seekers including the almost 50.000 who have arrived in Greece since July 2019 are effectively prevented from accessing the care and medicines that they need to tackle serious and often chronic diseases. Moreover, without AMKA, they can face difficulties in accessing other services, including seeking employment and social assistance. I am aware that for many years, due to the large number of arrivals of asylum-seekers at its borders, Greece has been under enormous pressure while the rest of Europe is not taking its fair share. However, this situation puts the health and lives of people at risk and is a serious breach of the internationally recognized right to health, that Greece is bound to respect under national, international and European law.

In view of the above, I urge you to take immediate action to ensure that asylum-seekers, unaccompanied children and children born in Greece from parents with an irregular migration status can access free healthcare in the public system, as mandated by Greek Law 4368/2016.

Yours sincerely,