

## PRESS RELEASE

### **20 Organizations and Lawyers call for voting against provisions that jeopardize fundamental rights of applicants for international protection**

Athens, 7 May 2020 - Following a joint memorandum sent to the Minister of Immigration and Asylum and Parliament on 5 May, twenty civil society organizations and lawyers stress that provisions of the new asylum bill further jeopardize the rights of applicants of international protection and the guarantees of the asylum procedure.

They note that the ongoing changes in the law in a short period of time - without even taking into account the multiple issues arising from the implementation of existing asylum legislation - are creating further delays, while there are provisions that do not reflect the reality in the field, which may lead to violations of national and EU law.

Among other things, the new measures:

- \* maintain the examination of asylum applications of unaccompanied children within the fast-track procedure (Law 4636/2019), which is not in their best interest, a provision that needs to be amended,
- \* abolish the priority of examining asylum claims of vulnerable asylum seekers (unaccompanied children, victims of torture, violence, etc.), risking their exclusion from the more favorable treatment provided by EU law for their protection,
- \* further reduce deadlines, in particular for appeals,
- \* abolish the possibility of the Independent Appeals Committees to refer cases to the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum for the issuance of residence permits for humanitarian reasons, endangering the fundamental rights of people who, although not beneficiaries of international protection, have the right to reside in Greece, such as unaccompanied children and those with serious health problems,
- \* further generalize the use of administrative detention, making this method the norm, against the provision of EU law, where it is an exception.

Steps such as the establishment of the new Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Children can work positively, as long as the guardianship institution is launched and steps are taken to end the detention/"protective custody" of unaccompanied children. The timely staffing, moreover, of the new Secretariat with properly trained staff and coordination with the other competent authorities, in particular the National Centre of Social Solidarity, should be ensured.

Many of the provisions of the bill will have severe consequences for the lives of thousands of people, depriving them of access to fundamental rights, again undermining the European acquis in the field of asylum, and in fact will ensure neither the improvement nor the acceleration of the asylum procedures.

For these reasons, the organizations call on Members of Parliament not to proceed with the voting on the contested provisions of the draft law.

**Signatory Organizations:** ActionAid Hellas, ΑΙΤΗΜΑ, ΑΡΣΙΣ – Κοινωνική Οργάνωση Υποστήριξης Νέων, ASB, Γιατροί του Κόσμου, Δίκτυο για τα Δικαιώματα του Παιδιού, Δανικό Συμβούλιο για τους Πρόσφυγες (DRC Greece), Defence for Children International Greece (DCI Greece), ΔΙΟΤΙΜΑ, Equal Rights Beyond Borders, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Ελληνικό Συμβούλιο για τους Πρόσφυγες (ΕΣΠ), Ελληνικό Φόρουμ Προσφύγων, ΗΙΑΣ Ελλάδας, Human Rights 360, Legal Center Lesbos, Μητρώο Δικηγόρων Νομικής Συνδρομής Υπηρεσίας Ασύλου, Refugee Support Aegean- RSA, Solidarity Now, Terre des Hommes Hellas, The HOME Project.