



Generation 2.0
For Rights Equality & Diversity

GENERATION 2.0 RED

Report on the Directorates of Foreigners
and Immigration of the Decentralized
Administration of Attica

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Contents

A short introduction to Generation's 2.0 for Rights, Equality & Diversity	2
Introduction	4
I. General assessment of the situation in the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration of Attica	6
II. Documentation of Issues	7
Processing times in the issuing of residence permits	7
Understaffing of services.....	8
Building Infrastructure.....	9
III. Categories of residence permits with significant delays in their issuing.....	9
Residence permit for exceptional reasons	9
Permanent residence permit for investors	10
IV. Covid-19 and the consequences on the operation of the DFIs.....	11
Closure and reopening of DFIs	11
Extensions of residence permits	12
Online platform	12
V. Good practices	13
VI. Proposals from Generation 2.0 RED	13
Understaffing.....	13
Utilization of new technologies.....	14
Restructuring of the residence permit for exceptional reasons	14
Conclusion.....	16
Annexes.....	17
Annex 1: Processing of the Applications of the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration of the Decentralized Administration of Attica	17
Annex 2: Number of applications at the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration of the Decentralized Administration of Attica.....	18
Annex 3: Staffing of the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration of the Decentralized Administration of Attica	19

A short introduction to Generation's 2.0 for Rights, Equality & Diversity

[Generation's 2.0 for Rights, Equality & Diversity](#) (Generation 2.0 RED) began in 2006 as an initiative of a group of young people of migrant background born or raised in Greece. Then, operating as a non-formal group known as "Second Generation" the goal was to secure the right to citizenship for the generation of invisible children with migrant background who were born and/or raised in Greece. Today, Generation 2.0 RED is a non-profit organization consisted of an interdisciplinary team, representing a mix of ethnicities and social backgrounds, who work together to promote equal participation in a diverse society. G2RED is the generation of young people living in Greece, with different origins, sharing the common belief that all of us have the right to equal and active citizenry on an individual and communal level. We are engaged to advocate and shape the public discourse for equal participation and inclusion in a diverse society. G2RED follows a holistic approach, with action and research, aiming to promote human rights, equality and diversity, fight racism, xenophobia and discrimination in general.

From 2008, the year we were founded, we have completed campaigns that led to the right of Greek citizenship for the second generation, not only have we increased the services we provide daily for free, but we have participated in festivals and have organized our own events that promote human rights as well. We participate and cooperate with the largest human rights networks in Greece and Europe, claiming the rights of socially vulnerable groups, regardless of their origin, nationality, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

What we do

[Advocacy](#)

As an organization which emerged from a campaign, advocacy plays an integral role across all our activities. G2RED advocates to shape the public discourse for equal participation and inclusion in a diverse society. The main thematic priorities are migration and citizenship, equal treatment, and equal access to social and labor rights. Our advocacy work includes various activities, some of which are awareness raising campaigns, informative sessions, institutional mediation, the Observatory on Citizenship, ASET, interventions in cases of violations of rights and administrative failures and various publications.

[Legal Counselling & Intercultural Mediation](#)

Service for migrants, refugees and second generation youth, regarding their documentation in Greece. Through individual sessions, beneficiaries are informed on their rights and their eligibility to apply for a residence permit or citizenship.

[Career Counselling](#)

Service for migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and second generation youth. Through a structured, multi-faceted program including individual counselling sessions, skills development groups and seminar/workshops, beneficiaries are guided to navigate successfully into the Greek labor market and are empowered in order to restart their career in Greece. The program of the Career Counselling goes in hand with the "[Diversity in the](#)

[Workplace](#)” Network, consisted of private sector companies and organizations supporting diversity and offering multiple opportunities, such as hard-skills trainings to people completing the Career Counselling program.

[Non-Formal Education](#)

Greek Language classes for those who want to improve their everyday communication and for those wishing to take the Certification of Attainment in Greek, preparation classes for the Naturalization Interview with 100% success, addressed to adults using adequate tutoring methods and tools. At the same time, educational programs and tools are implemented that promote human rights and respect for diversity, with the floorboard game "Diversity Volcano".

[ASET](#)

At the initiative of G2RED, the Representative Council for Research and Documentation (ASET) is being set up to respond to today’s challenges in the area of migration. Specialized on rights-based advocacy, ASET intends first to highlight the problems and secondly through study, research and documentation to intervene accordingly towards the best possible solution. The council is made up of representatives of immigrant communities operating in Greece with years of experience and engagement in socio-political activities. Other members also include researchers and experts with experience and expertise on migration as well as in the area of advocacy and rights protection.

[Manolada Watch](#)

An initiative of Generation 2.0 RED for the monitoring of working and living conditions of the migrant agricultural workers at Manolada in Ilia, Greece. Since 2017 as an organization, we have been dealing with the situation in the region, which has resulted us in having a lot of data and relevant experience. We decided to share the experience with the public in order to contribute to the awareness of the Greek society and the public authorities for the case of Manolada.

Introduction

In 2014, the "Immigration and Social Integration Code" was transposed into Greek law for the first time with the enactment of Law 4251/2014 (Government Gazette A' 80 /1.4.2014). The Code compiled the hitherto scattered provisions on immigration. It introduced new regulations giving a more comprehensive and centralized legal framework for the legal status of residence and the social integration of third country nationals (TCN) in Greece.

From the beginning of the implementation of the Immigration and Social Integration Code until today, Generation 2.0 RED carries out regular visits to the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration (DFI) of the Decentralized Administration in the region of Attica, in order to monitor the implementation of the relevant laws and in that way ensuring the proper functioning of the administrative procedures for the issuance of residence permits. In fact, in 2014 for a period of 8 months it provided [Cultural Mediation, Interpretation & Consulting](#) in two Directorates of Attica, Athens A 'and Central and Western Attica, contributing in practice to the improvement of the daily services provided.

Today, six years after the enactment of the Code, despite various legislative initiatives, starting with the original Code and its subsequent amendments, the problems in its practical implementation by the public administration, and more specifically in the operation of the system for issuing residence permits, not only have not been resolved, but have expanded. Gaps or problems have been observed, relating either to the organization of the services provided or to failures in the design of immigration policies and in the institutional approach to the realities of immigration.

This report is an initiative of the organization Generation 2.0 RED in the context of the systematic monitoring of the implementation of the Immigration and Social Integration Code (Law 4251/2014) by the competent bodies, by the department of [advocacy](#) as well as through the [legal counselling](#) which we provide to TCN's daily. The aim is to record the situation as observed in DFI's of the Decentralized Administration of Attica, as shown by the data we collected during the period February-March 2020 and updated in October 2020. The information was collated from meetings of the organization with the heads of the four DFIs of the Decentralized Administration of Attica: Athens A, Central and Western Attica (known as Athens B'), Northern & Eastern Attica, and, Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands. From the discussions had, based on a common open questionnaire, the data provided to us as well as our own experience in the field, we documented the most important and chronic issues faced by the Directorates.

The first chapter presents a general assessment of the situation in DFIs of Attica as it has been formed today. The second chapter follows a documentation of the most critical issues that exist today and are specifically related to the processing times involved in the issuing of residence permits and issues related to the staffing of the services. The third chapter presents specific categories of residence permits with significant delays in their issuing. Then, the fourth chapter presents the consequences of the various preventive measures against the spread of coronavirus (covid-19) taken in the period from 11 March 2020 to 24 April 2020 on the operation of the DFIs. In the fifth chapter, some good practices that the DFIs themselves

have implemented in order to improve the administrative malfunctions that have arisen are listed. In the sixth and final chapter of the report, remarks and suggestions are made to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum on the issues reflected in the report, in order to improve the operation of the administrative procedures for issuing residence permits by the DFIs.

I. General assessment of the situation in the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration of Attica

In the context of the reorganization of the system for the residence of TCN's in the country, in 2011 with article 2 of law 4018/2011 (Government Gazette A'/215), the responsibility of receiving applications for the issuance of residence permits to TCN's was transferred from the then Offices for Foreigners of the Municipalities (Local Government Organizations) to the Immigration Services of the Decentralized Administrations¹. This administrative transfer, however, which aimed at the implementation of a more centralized system of administration, was not implemented immediately or evenly throughout the Greek territory. On the contrary, its implementation was completed on January 1, 2014, with the transfer of all TCN services (i.e. receipt of residence permit applications and information) from the Municipalities, to the Decentralized Administrations of the country. In Attica in particular, the service of TCN was withdrawn from the sixty-six Municipalities and transferred to four DFI's of the Decentralized Administration of Attica: Athens A, Central and Western Attica, Northern & Eastern Attica, and, Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands.

Today, the applications for the issuance of residence permits are submitted to the one-stop service of each competent DFI of the Decentralized Administration of the place of residence of the TCN or to the competent Directorate of Immigration Policy of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.

Despite changes in administrative procedures aimed at consolidating an operational law enforcement system, the public administration continues to delay in the processing of applications for the issuance and/or renewal of residence permits.

Especially in recent years, from the end of 2016 onwards, a return to previous years, before the reorganization of 2014 has been observed. In other words, TCN's are faced with services unable to meet their requests within a reasonable time. Consequently, resulting in them living in a permanently precarious residence status. Delays in servicing applications, among others, are mainly attributed to the lack of the required staffing and logistical support (building infrastructure etc.), especially in large cities.

From the Administration side, the situation worsened after December 2016, due to the transfer of the responsibility for issuing residence permits for exceptional reasons from the Directorate of Immigration Policy of the Ministry of Migration Policy (with a Ministerial Decision of 2016), to the already overburdened DFI's of the Decentralized Administrations. The transfer, however, took effect in March 2017. All applications submitted before this date remained with the former Ministry of Migration Policy, now Ministry of Migration and Asylum, to be processed by the Directorate of Immigration Policy.

¹ The Municipalities at that time, functioned as collection stations, provided information, paid fees and received the applications which they then forwarded to the then Decentralized Administrations, which continued to have the authority of issuing residence permits. This system, however, proved to be quite time consuming while issues of corruption also came to light as we were informed by the Heads of the DFIs.

The transfer of the responsibilities of the Directorate of Immigration Policy of the Ministry to the DFI's without the necessary reinforcements, in practice led to the inability of the services to respond to all of the requests submitted by TCN's at each DFI.

II. Documentation of Issues

Following is a recording of the individual issues as they were conveyed to us by the Heads of the DFIs.

Processing times in the issuing of residence permits

One of the main and chronic problems that concerns both the immigrant population and the relevant services themselves, is the extreme delays observed in the issuance of residence permits. Today, the waiting time for a TCN to receive the residence permit they have applied for ranges from 2-3 months at best and can reach up to 3 years at worst (see Annex 1).

According to the Heads of the DFIs, the delay is attributed to the chronic understaffing of the services. The understaffing in practice affects the operation of the Directorate, because in order to respond to the volume of applications, therefore to receiving them, all employees are forced to the "front line" i.e. in the customer service posts, resulting in there not being enough staff to examine the files. This mode of operation however, leads to the systematic piling up of applications (see Annex 2) and therefore to serious delays in processing them. More information on the issue of understaffing can be found in the following section. As an administrative procedure, for a Directorate, the processing of an application submitted by a TCN differs based on if it is for the issuance or the renewal of a residence permit. In the first case more supporting documents are presented therefore, the examining of the file involves more stages. In addition, the examination process differs by residence permit category due to the different supporting documents required.

In most Directorates, applications, regardless of their processing steps, are processed in the order in which they were submitted. An exception is DFI Athens A' which has implemented a special operating system to issue faster some categories of residence permits whose file examining and therefore bureaucratic process is easier (such as the residence permits for second generation, dependent work and family reunification). The remaining DFIs stated that they do not have the ability to sort out the residence permits so that the "easier" ones in terms of processing can be issued more immediately.

The biggest delays which lead to accumulation of applications are observed² for the DFIs of Athens A' as well as the DFI of Northern & Eastern Attica in the checking of arrivals and departures of the TCN's from the country, with the DFI of Athens A' declaring further delays in the correspondence for supporting documents.

A proof of the magnitude of the delays is the fact that DFIs have reached the point of renewing the residence permit application certificate, known as the "blue certificate", which normally

² The DFIs of Central and Western Attica and Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands did not provide us with this specific information.

has a validity of one year and is issued to the TCN as proof of legal residence, until the service processes their application and issues their residence permit.

Understaffing of services

The staffing of services is an issue that comes up when mentioning the delays in processing applications as a direct result of the understaffing of the Directorates, of which after the departure of a large number of employees, have shrunk significantly in numbers (see Annex 3).

Thus, the remaining staff is not sufficient to meet the needs and the volume of applications received by the Directorates, resulting in citizens not being attended to.

A notable example is the DFI of Northern & Eastern Attica which has the smallest number of staff compared to the other Directorates of Attica. In total there are 19 permanent employees (including supervisors) and 14 contract staff³. Respectively, in the DFI of the Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands there are less than 33 permanent employees of which 5 are supervisors (1 Director and 4 Heads of Departments), and another 15 are contract staff.

To meet the immediate needs of the service, each DFI has implemented a specific mode of operation.

In Athens A', for example, the distribution of employees per department is approximately as follows: 17 in customer service posts for submissions (the so-called counter posts), 5 in receiving biometrics, 5 in information and appointments, 5 in issuance and 9 in records where due to lack of security of all the buildings of the Services some employees are forced to take on this role⁴, something which is not their responsibility. So, 41 out of 50 employees are forced to take on the so-called "reception" posts, which means that there are no people to process the applications (the "support posts"). If within this, we take into account the annual leaves that employees are entitled to, then from time to time the problem intensifies in terms of the ability of the Directorates to serve the TCN's.

In the DFI of Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands, about 14 people undertake customer service, 1 person is on records while some take on the role of security guard. This specific service, at its own initiative, at the end of 2019, in order to deal with the volume of applications being submitted, received applications for 4 consecutive Fridays, while usually the Directorates receive applications 4 days a week and 1 day, on Fridays, they examine and process them.

It is worth noting that the Decentralized Administration cannot take on employees from other public administration services through the mobility scheme (transfers or secondments of staff) as a condition for this is the existence of a new organization mandate that will meet the

³ In October 2019, all DFIs of Attica were staffed with contract staff whose contract expired in May 2020, was initially renewed until September 2020 and then renewed for a year, until October 2021.

⁴ The contract of the building security company was renewed in May 2020, valid until September 2020. Since then, there is a short-term contract in force until the completion of the contracting competition for the new contract which is in progress.

new needs⁵. The employees of the Decentralized Administrations however can use the regulations on the mobility of civil servants to leave the services.

Building Infrastructure

Many of the services of Attica are housed in inadequate building infrastructure, which has an impact on both the quality of the employees' work and the service being provided to the public.

Regarding the infrastructure of the Directorates, all the Heads stated that they face problems of adequacy of space, since the existing building infrastructure of the Directorates is not enough for the number of TCN's served.

Specifically, the DFI of Athens A 'and the DFI of Central and Western Attica share the same building, a fact that brings difficulties in the proper operation of their services and in the service of the citizens. For this reason, the DFI of Central and Western Attica is already in the process of requesting its relocation to more suitable structures.

The DFI of Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands, although it technically has the necessary space for the proper customer service of citizens, in essence, because it is housed in the same space with the services of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, which has less attendance, the needs of the DFI are not adequately covered. However, there is a plan to transfer the services of the Ministry.

III. Categories of residence permits with significant delays in their issuing

Residence permit for exceptional reasons

Article 19 of the Code (Law 4251/2014), and its subsequent amendments, regulates the special procedure and conditions for the issuance of a residence permit in Greece for "exceptional reasons", which is granted when a third country national proves that they have developed strong ties with the country. The residence permit for exceptional reasons is granted for three (3) years. According to the most recent legislative amendment⁶ of this category (Law 4540/2018), the interested person must prove with dated documents the fact of their stay in the country for at least seven consecutive years before the submitting of the application.

As explained in detail in a previous section, the 2017 transfer of responsibility for receiving applications from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum to the DFI has not worked smoothly.

⁵ It is usually in the form of a ministerial decision which defines the organization chart of the Decentralized Administration. The existing chart, is from 2010 where the services were under a different administrative composition, therefore making it obsolete.

⁶ After the last changes made by Law 4540/2018, the said permit has a validity period of 3 years (from the 2 that were previously) while typically "strong ties" are no longer required. Instead, proof of 7 years of residence in the country is required by submitting supporting documents. In addition, the beneficiaries of this residence permit are not only people who do not have a residence permit, but also parents of minor nationals. The provision for TCN's who recently lost their legal residence existed in Law 4332/2015 and was abolished as a category in Law 4540/2018.

In general, there is a long delay in the appointments for applying for this permit, especially in the urban centers of the country, culminating in Athens where the appointments for the submission of documents are now being scheduled for 2021. Specifically, in Athens A' appointments are scheduled for 1.5 years later. It should be noted that from the beginning of the implementation of the administrative transfer of the residence permit for exceptional reasons to the DFIs, this specific Directorate received the largest volume of applications, namely 25,000. Today, in the said DFI the total number of pending applications amounts to 2,000 while during this period applications submitted 2018 are being processed.

In Athens B' appointments are being scheduled for December 2020, in Northern & Eastern Attica for April-May 2020 and in Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands for March 2021. In addition, in the last service new appointments have been frozen with forecast to start again in March 2020⁷.

The delay in the appointments in combination with the non-provision of a document indicating a proof of attempting to apply has as a result the prolongment of the period during which a TCN remains without legal documents and therefore in a state of residency insecurity in the country, due to bureaucracy and administrative incompetence.

Permanent residence permit for investors

The second category of residence permits, with which the services face issues is the permit for investors.

The current legislation (article 20 par. B. L 4251/2014 and article 8 par. 26-30 and article 14 par. 1 of Law 4332/2015 (Government Gazette A'76)) provides for the possibility of granting a five-year residence permit, known as the "Golden Visa", to TCN's if they make an investment in real estate, amounting to at least 250,000 euros. The administrative procedure for processing such applications falls within the responsibility of the DFIs.

The delays in recent years in the services of Attica, which receive the largest volume of applications, make it clear that the already overburdened services cannot meet the volume of applications especially for the time limits set by law, where the processing and issuance of these permits, provided they are accompanied by complete supporting documents, must be completed within two months (article 20 par. B point 7 of Law 4251/14).

Specifically, in Athens B' appointments are being scheduled for March 2021, in Northern & Eastern Attica for November 2020 and in Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands for March 2021⁸. In addition, the last service had to freeze appointments until March 2020. However,

⁷ By order of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, the Directorate of Immigration Policy of the Ministry as well as all the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration of the Decentralized Administrations were closed to the public from Thursday 12/03/2020 to Friday 15/05/2020 as a precautionary measure against the spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19). At the time of writing, there is no information on the rescheduling of appointments.

⁸ DFI Athens A' did not provide us with this data.

having exceeded this timeframe the new plan was to begin scheduling appointments again in March 2020⁹.

IV. Covid-19 and the consequences on the operation of the DFIs

Between March 11, 2020 and April 24, 2020, a series of preventive measures were taken against the spread of the coronavirus (covid-19), which affected the operation of the DFIs throughout the country. These concern the closure of the DFIs to the public from 12/3/2020 until 15/5/2020 with immediate consequence the need to impose a series of extensions of residence permits. While the imposition of measures was inevitable given the conditions of the covid-19 pandemic, their design and administrative implementation have caused a number of difficulties both in the reopening of the DFIs, especially in Attica, and in the safeguarding of the legal residence of TCNs¹⁰.

Closure and reopening of DFIs

During the suspension of the public reception at the DFIs, a series of announcements were published by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, with the ultimate goal of restoring the operation of the DFIs and the residence permit system.

Initially, the Ministry issued a decision on the possibility of sending by courier the residence permits that were ready for collection. While the intention was directed at preventing the accumulation of a large volume of collections, this decision was never implemented.

The Ministry then announced that from 18/05/2020 the DFIs would start their re-operation with the process of collection of residence permits and from 25/02/2020 an electronic platform (e-appointment) would be launched, where TCNs could make an appointment to collect their residence permit. However, due to "unforeseen technical reasons¹¹", the launch of the application was delayed. As a result, the services implemented a series of practices, in order to regain their smooth operation and in an effort to serve citizens, which on the one hand concerned only certain categories of residence permits, on the other hand differed between each service.

The main obstacle however, in the smooth reopening of the DFIs was the fact that the possibility of applying for first issuance and renewal of residence permits did not exist from March 2020 until the end of July 2020. In fact, the main issue is that the appointments for applying for the residence permit for exceptional reasons, a permit that already has significant delays in the DFIs of Attica, have been stopped completely. As a result, the right of access to

⁹ In the context of the DFI's closure to the from 12/3/2020 to 15/5/2020 due to the preventive measures against the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), the Ministry of Migration and Asylum issued on 9 June 2020 a Ministerial Decision no. 16393/2020 which allows the submission of relevant applications to the Directorate of Immigration Policy of the Ministry.

¹⁰ Generation 2.0 RED was quick to highlight (29/06/2020) the urgent issues emerging as a direct consequence of the preventive measures against the spread of coronavirus (covid-19) in the Press Release "[Residence permits in state of emergency](#)".

¹¹ According to an announcement of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum that was sent to the DFIs via electronic mail, as stated in an [announcement](#) of the DFIs on May 22, 2020.

legalization, for TCNs who have been living in the country for seven years, has been frozen in Attica since March 2020. At the time of writing, there is no information on the process of rescheduling appointments in Athens.

Extensions of residence permits

Between 11 March 2020 and 24 April 2020, a series of extensions of residence permits were imposed due to the closure of the DFIs to the public as part of the preventive measures against the spread of coronavirus (covid-19).

In the first extension, the residence permits which expired in the period between 11 February 2020 until 12 May 2020 were extended for 5 months from their expiration date. In the second extension, those that expired from 1 December 2019 until 30 June 2020 received an extension until the end of the year (31/12/2020). In the third and most recent extension, residence permits and residence permit application certificates (blue certificate) with an expiration date of 20 July 2020 until 31 December 2020 were extended for an additional 8 months from their expiration date.

While the imposition of these extensions was inevitable given the closure of the DFIs to the public, their design and the way in which they were managed brought fourth a number of issues for both the DFI's as well as the TCNs themselves. A main issue however regarding the extensions was the fact that there was a peculiar gap between them since the residence permits that expired from 1-19 July 2020 did not receive any extension. In other words, these permits were the only ones that not only had to be renewed but also within the deadlines set by law.

In addition, due to the lack of information sharing between the ministries and the lack of updating of their information systems, TCNs whose residence permit has been extended face serious issues in their exchanges with other public services (e.g. National Healthcare, Unemployment Office, Tax Office) or the private sector (e.g. banks) when displaying expired (but valid) cards and certificates.

Online platform

The Ministry of Migration and Asylum announced that on 25/02/2020 the operation of an electronic platform (e-appointment) would begin where TCNs could make appointments to collect their residence permit.

However, the platform was launched in the end on 19 June 2020, starting with the appointments for the collection of residence permits. Then, on 30 July 2020, the possibility of scheduling an appointment for the renewal of the residence permit was added, as well as the initial issuance for a minor child. However, the addition of this possibility was accompanied by a complete lack of planning and prioritization of the renewal of residence permits based on their expiration date. The DFIs themselves, in an effort to prevent the chaos that would ensue, added a strong recommendation to their announcement, calling on the TCNs and lawyers to show restraint and give priority to appointments for renewals of permits that expired in the first half of 2020 or earlier. However, as expected, due to the lack of an in-app prioritization of renewals based on expiration date, appointments ran out from the very first

days of August 2020. Finally, on 21/10/2020, in an attempt to create some balance, appointments via the platform re-opened, this time only for the renewal of residence permits that expired from 1/12/2019 to 30/6/2020.

Although the procedures have now begun to be restored, the initial lack of planning has already created inequalities, further delays and, above all, issues of maintaining legal residence.

V. Good practices

Despite the obstacles and difficulties, some services try to implement some good practices in order to improve the administrative malfunctions that arise.

Athens A': To prevent the accumulation of applications and to issue residence permits faster, the Directorate has implemented the following practices. Specifically, upon receipt of the applications the employees carry out an on-site evaluation, and once the public reception hours end they examine the files in order to immediately map out the processing to follow. Thus, within the same week of receiving the applications, 70% -80% of them have been checked. In this way they have managed to reduce the waiting time. That is, while the appointments for the submission of an application are scheduled in a period from 2.5 to 3 months from the initial visit of a TCN to the service, from the date of submission of the application, until the day of receiving the permit the timeframe is about 15-20 days.

Another good practice that was implemented at the initiative of the Directorate itself and has improved its operation is the appointment for collection. Through this practice they have managed to reduce queues at the service by about 70 to 80 people.

Northern & Eastern Attica: To deal with the volume of pending cases, where the total number amounts to 20,000 and includes applications submitted in 2017, at the initiative of the service, a working group of 3 people was created to manage the backlog of 2017.

VI. Proposals from Generation 2.0 RED

In relation to the abovementioned issues, evaluating the conditions based on the field visits that took place and taking into account the remarks of the Heads of Directorates, we would like to make the following proposals to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum as well as to the Decentralized Administration, to improve the current situation in the DFIs:

Understaffing

Firstly, the DFIs must be staffed further. Then, regarding employee mobility, a minimum staff threshold needs to be established by which a service is able to be fully operational, in a way that does not affect the right to mobility.

Utilization of new technologies

In addition to understaffing, it is clear that the delays are due to the lack of digital mainstreaming.

In the context of the implementation of new e-government services in the field of immigration from June 2019, the e-appointment for renewals and re-issuance of residence permits was implemented exclusively in the DFI of Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands in a pilot phase. Then, on 19/06/2020, an [electronic platform \(e-appointment\)](#) was launched, where TCNs themselves can schedule their appointment for the collection as well as renewal of their residence permit.

However, ensuring the digitization of other procedures such as the first issuance of residence permits is still an urgent concern. The electronic "application/submission" of some residence permits (such as second generation, dependent work and family reunification) is a feasible solution and provisions for it need to be made in the near future. These are procedures that do not require additional staff, therefore reducing the need for physical presence of TCNs in the services will greatly lighten the workload of the employees of the service.

More specifically, and according to the experience of the DFI of Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands from the pilot electronic appointment, the following improvements are proposed:

- Possibility to choose the time of the appointment as well as cancellation of the appointment, because so far there is no possibility of cancellation in the event that the person cannot attend, therefore making the appointment unavailable to another person.
- Automatic cancellation of other active online appointments when someone submits their application¹².

It should be noted, however, that the "digitization" of some procedures does not negate the need for sufficient staff to process the applications submitted in a timely manner.

Restructuring of the residence permit for exceptional reasons

What was mentioned by the services as a general remark regarding the residence permit for exceptional reasons is that the relevant legal framework maintains a situation of permanent temporality and precariousness for the TCNs concerned. Moreover, with the current prevailing precarious state of maintaining legal residence for a TCN, the administrative work is essentially lost since the person concerned may lose their legal status once again.

Some proposals for reshaping the exceptional reasons as well as avoiding the accumulation of applications are:

- Include the booking of appointments in the online platform so that the extreme delays in appointments that were observed until March 2020 can be avoided.

¹² In an attempt to bypass extreme delays, it has been observed that TCNs submit applications to different services stating different addresses in an effort to be attended to more quickly.

- To reconsider the provision of a special category for exceptional reasons, for those who had legal residence in the past (recently expired permits), in order to prioritize the examination of such applications as well as provide such applicants with a "blue certificate".
- When scheduling an appointment, check the applicants' file ensure the validity of the claim by checking for the seven-year start date.
- To reconsider the competent administrative responsibility of processing the exceptional reasons so that the DFIs of Attica are not burdened with the largest volume of applications.

Conclusion

The substantial social integration of the immigrant population will be achieved when immigrants feel that they are desirable, active and equal members of Greek society. The first step in this direction is to ensure the smooth and equal access of this population to the processes that ultimately determine their daily lives. In other words, on a legal and administrative level, unhindered access means, first of all, securing and safeguarding the right to legal status.

The current issues in the system for granting resident permits negatively impact a TCNs ability in obtaining and/or maintaining legal residence. In addition, between 11 March 2020 and 24 April 2020, due to the coronavirus (covid-19), the DFIs of the Decentralized Administrations as well as in the Directorate of Immigration Policy were closed to the public from 12/3/2020 until 15/5/2020 and extensions of residence permits were granted. While the imposition of these measures was inevitable given the conditions of the covid-19 pandemic, their design and administrative implementation make the operation of the DFIs of the Decentralized Administrations even more difficult. As existing obstacles arise from bureaucratic difficulties, administrative practices, and institutional gaps, we call on the Ministry of Migration and Asylum to consider our proposals and take the necessary steps towards their resolve.

Finally, we would like to thank the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration for their valuable contribution to our effort in documenting the current situation as well as for the constructive dialogue proposals for its improvement that ensued.

Annexes

The data reflected in the following tables are derived from the information we requested from the Heads of the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration of the Decentralized Administration of Attica in February, March and September 2020 and we gradually received during this period. The empty fields indicated are due to not being provided with the relevant data.

Annex 1: Processing of the Applications of the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration of the Decentralized Administration of Attica

	DFI Athens A	DFI Central and Western Attica	DFI Northern & Eastern Attica	DFI Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands ¹³
Average waiting time for a TCN to receive the residence permit they have applied for	2-3 months ¹⁴		3 years ¹⁵	9-12 months ¹⁶
Month and/or year of applications being processed		12/2019 ¹⁷	2017 ¹⁸	B semester 2019 ¹⁹

¹³ Due to the intensity of the collection process, the processing time from December 2018 onwards has constantly increased. It started at 2 months after filing and reached a pre-public health emergency due to covid-19 time of 9-12 months.

¹⁴ Information provided by the DFI in March 2020.

¹⁵ Information provided by the DFI in February 2020.

¹⁶ Information provided by the DFI in April 2020.

¹⁷ Information provided by the DFI in February 2020.

¹⁸ Information provided by the DFI in February 2020.

¹⁹ Information provided by the DFI related to 6/7/2020.

Annex 2: Number of applications at the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration of the Decentralized Administration of Attica

	DFI Athens A	DFI Central and Western Attica	DFI Northern & Eastern Attica	DFI Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands
Average number of applications managed by the service (per month)	About 2500 (while issued in the same number). Of the 10 applications submitted to the service, 3 are first issuances ²⁰			About 2500 ²¹
Total number of pending applications	Exceptional reasons: about 2,000 applications out of a total of 21,000 received ²² . Other categories from 1/1/2018: approximately 4,300 applications out of 49,100 received ²³		20,000 ²⁴	Above 13,000 ²⁵ In the final stages of processing and expecting issuing are about 1,000 ²⁶

²⁰ Information provided by the DFI in March 2020.

²¹ Information provided by the DFI in April 2020.

²² From 26/10/2015, the date of the beginning of the receiving of applications for exceptional reasons and their family members (children) as well as legalization of those with a child born Greece before July 2015 Law 4332/15. Information provided by the DFI in March 2020.

²³ Information provided by the DFI in March 2020.

²⁴ Information provided by the DFI in February 2020.

²⁵ These include cases that are pending due to court proceedings etc.

²⁶ Information provided by the DFI in April 2020.

Annex 3: Staffing of the Directorates of Foreigners & Immigration of the Decentralized Administration of Attica

	DFI Athens A	DFI Central and Western Attica	DFI Northern & Eastern Attica	DFI Southern Attica, Piraeus and the Islands
Recorded number of employees	73 ²⁷			
Actual number of employees	56 (where 6 are supervisors of departments) ²⁸		19 permanent employees (including supervisors) and 14 contract employees ²⁹	31 permanent employees (from which 3 are on various forms of leave, 5 are supervisors and 15 contract employees) ³⁰

²⁷ Information provided by the DFI in March 2020.

²⁸ Information provided by the DFI in March 2020.

²⁹ Data provided by the DFI in September 2020.

³⁰ Data provided by the DFI in September 2020.