

Yesterday I was getting my residence permit in the immigration office in Kalamaria. The office is located at Oikonomidi 1. It started reopening a week ago. I was there previously two times. A very little has changed since I was there in January. The same omnipresent crowd of people both inside and outside of the building. The density of the crowd is incredible as in a city bus in rush hours.

During the week I made two phone calls to the office in order to schedule my visit. I needed to get my issued residence permit card. First, they asked to call a few days later and then on Thursday they asked to come in person on Friday to get the plastic card. A woman on the phone said that today I could come to get my documents from 9 am to 13:00. Also she pointed out that she will inform other guys about me as I do not have a local phone number and therefore have got no verification sms. Typically, the latter is required for standard processing. However, I am using a foreign number. They couldn't send sms there.

22 May, Friday I woke up at 8:30 and 8:45 I was in a Mercedes Radio taxi heading to Oikonomidi 1. It was a short trip. Roads despite the recent lockdown were overloaded with traffic. However, around 9am I was at the destination. I naively assumed that I would be able to ask the driver to wait while I am getting my document. So that when I got the papers I could get back by the same car. However, it was not the case. The officer booth that usually has an officer within and a window open for the queue was closed. There were many folks. Some of them were in a sort of queue. Others were dispersed through the surrounding area waiting around. Moreover, nobody seemed to care about social distancing. People arrived further and the booth remained closed. Some of the people smoked cigarettes. Others spoke on the phone or drank coffee from plastic or paper cups. It was all very chaotic.

Initially I tried to secure a place in the queue keeping social distance at the same time. It was a tricky exercise and I ended up with a decision to sit on a seat away to wait until the queue dissolves on itself. After a while I found that despite the regular service window of the booth being closed, there is a door on the other side of the booth where an officer can be approached. After getting to them and being redirected to another officer who asked to sit for another 45-70 minutes the process went through. I got my card, caught a taxi and until 12:00 I was back downtown.

To sum all up, it was a terrific experience. However, greek officers were kind and friendly. They even found a guy who speaks my language. Moreover, It was terrific because of the human mess that suddenly made me feel that I got all diverse covid variations through breathing air in close distance with crowds of people from all over the world being stuck there for hours. Next time I will be looking for quiet hours or for an attorney to get matters with their office settled, perhaps. It would be brilliant if they offered delivery of papers with postal service.