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Commission

MANAGING THE REFUGEE CRISIS

GREECE: PROGRESS REPORT

Effectively managing the pressure of migratory flows on the shared external border of the Schengen area requires both responsibility and solidarity by all Member States. When it comes to common external borders which are under particular pressure, it is of crucial importance that two key measures are fully implemented: the 'hotspot' approach and the relocation scheme – with the fingerprinting of all migrants, the prompt selection and relocation of asylum applicants and establishment of adequate reception capacities. The other essential component is action to secure swift return, voluntary or forced, of people not in need of international protection and who do not therefore qualify for relocation.

With the support of the European Commission, the delivery of fully operational hotspots in all identified locations is improving steadily, but Greece must take the necessary actions as soon as possible to complete what remains to be done. The Commission will continue to support the efforts of the Greek authorities and measure the progress made and continue to call for the intensification of efforts in this regard.

885 709 illegal border crossings were detected in Greece in 2015. Most of the irregular migrants - 876 777 - have arrived from Turkey. The migratory pressure remained high in 2016, until the end of February around 117 000 people disembarked on the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea. The scale is immense and the Commission is working very closely with the Greek authorities to assist them in this challenge.



A dedicated Commission team working under the leadership of the Commission's Director-General of the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) has been on the ground for months, working hand in hand with the Greek authorities, including to accelerate access to emergency funding, improve the coordination between the various actors, address administrative bottlenecks and facilitate knowledge sharing on border management and relocation.

The Commission contributed to the launch of the UNHCR rental scheme on 14 December, to provide 20,000 reception places for asylum seekers in Greece. The Commission is providing €80 million from the 2016 EU budget.



HOTSPOTS

Commission Recommendations of 15 December

- Complete construction of the 4 remaining hotspots
- Establish a structured legal and procedural system for disembarkation and transfers
- Member States to make available necessary experts to ensure full roll-out of the hotspots as soon as construction works are concluded; Greece to ensure deployment of sufficient number of team leaders and sufficient security personnel in the hotspot areas
- Update IT systems and deploy an additional fingerprinting machines
- Systematically fingerprint migrants and enter data in central Eurodac system
- Finalise work to enable proper access to security databases from hotspots
- Improve coordination in hotspots

Progress since December Recommendation

- Works completed in Lesbos, Chios, Samos and Leros. Hotspots operational with the assistance and temporary coordination of the Army, several actions still needed to make them function at full speed
- Work on the hotspot in Kos has started
- Legal provisions and standard operating procedures are being put in place for hotspot management
- Frontex Coastal Patrol Teams deployed in Lesbos, Chios and Samos.
- Frontex (516) and EASO (14) presence will increase in the coming weeks; further resources to be deployed as new Hotspots open.
- Every adult migrant arriving on the islands is now being fingerprinted (minors - under 14 years old - are not fingerprinted according to the Eurodac Regulation)
- 6 fingerprinting machines procured by the Hellenic Police are deployed in Lesbos; 25 fingerprinting machines procured by EASO are being delivered; 65 further fingerprinting stations have been ordered by EASO.
- Security checks have begun using the Schengen Information System (SIS), national and Interpol databases. Access to the Europol database is pending.
- Temporary Hotspot coordinators from the Hellenic Army appointed for every island; permanent coordinators to be appointed

RECEPTION CAPACITY

Commission Recommendations of 15 December

- Continue to increase reception capacity in line with the Western Balkans Leaders' meeting commitments
- Member States to complete contributions via the Civil Protection Mechanism
- Improve reception for vulnerable people, especially unaccompanied children

What has been done

- Total number of places currently available in reception facilities in Greece is 34,419 (excluding the UNHCR rental scheme)
- 17,906 open reception places on the Greek mainland
- 9,933 places in the Eastern Aegean islands (in the hotspots and at other locations)
- 1,221 places in dedicated facilities for asylum-seekers and unaccompanied minors in the mainland and the islands
- 5,359 places in pre-removal centres
- Total available places due to reach 38,619 on completion of planned works
- UNHCR continues to conclude implementing agreements to reach the target of an additional 20,000 places under the rental scheme.
- Civil Protection Mechanism activated; offers received from only 9 Member States
- UNICEF, the UNHCR and Save the Children have started a pilot project in Kos, Lesbos and Idomeni to provide dedicated care for minors. This is also intended to be extended to Samos and Leros. Greece should provide adequate accommodation capacity for these groups after they leave the islands
- Medical screening is foreseen in all functioning hotspots

RELOCATION



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Commission Recommendations of 15 December

- Step up information provision to refugees about the relocation programme
- Greek Asylum service to hire additional staff
- Member States to substantially reduce the response time to process relocation applications to avoid withdrawals of applications
- Member states to substantially increase their pledges for relocation places

What has been done

- Pledges from Member States increasing, but still insufficient: 960 additional relocation candidates identified; 1539 relocation places made available by 16 Member States
- IOM entrusted with the operational aspects of the relocation programme, 322 people relocated to other EU Member States
- Asylum Service working in Lesbos and Samos; EASO supporting screening process, provision of information and distribution of leaflets, coordinating pre-departure information with receiving Member States
- 8 EASO mobile units operating on the islands
- 37 persons to be hired by the Greek Asylum service before April, with up to 40 additional posts to be created by June; additional hires possible by January 2017
- Member States should strictly apply the criteria foreseen under the Council Decision when rejecting relocation applications



RETURN

Commission Recommendations of 15 December

- Develop a clear strategy for forced returns identifying priority third countries
- Step up forced as well as voluntary returns
- Promote information concerning Assisted Voluntary Return to migrants in the hotspot areas
- Commission to step up engagement with third countries on readmission

What has been done

- Return decisions now being issued through a simplified screening and processing regime
- Emergency Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) financed by the EU and implemented on emergency basis by IOM; almost 1,000 returns; 1400 migrants have so far volunteered
- Tendering process ongoing for a permanent Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) scheme
- Dedicated arrival points to be urgently set up for migrants returned from Idomeni to offer AVR
- Emergency forced return programme financed by EU; tender process to be urgently finalized
- IOM return office established in Lesbos and staff present in Samos
- Around 300 people readmitted to Turkey this week under the Greek-Turkish readmission agreement; further returns are expected to take place soon; further work to enhance implementation still necessary
- Commission in discussions with Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan on readmission.

IMPROVING BORDER MANAGEMENT

Commission Recommendations of 15 December

- Define and carry out deployment of Frontex operation on Northern Greek border
- Member States to pledge staff and equipment to ensure Frontex operations can be carried out

What has been done

- Frontex deployment launched in Idomeni region near Greek border with former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- Greece has appointed 105 police officers, including 5 team leaders, to work alongside 25 Frontex officers. However, so far Frontex has only been able to deploy 9 of these 25 officers.
- Rapid Border Intervention Team (RABIT) activated and operating in the Aegean islands with 775 experts deployed (243 crew members, 248 fingerprinters, 53 screening experts, 30 advanced documents experts, 75 interpreters, 16 debriefing experts, 8 Frontex support officers, 31 team leaders, 71 coordination staff)
- 83% of the required coverage pledged by Member States for Frontex operations.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The Commission has awarded €148 million in emergency funding to Greece, including an €80 million to help build reception capacity to house migrants and refugees in Greece via the UNHCR and €21 million via the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to support relocation.

The Commission has made available €509.4 million for migration and border management in the period from 2014-20 to facilitate reception, returns, and relocation in Greece.

